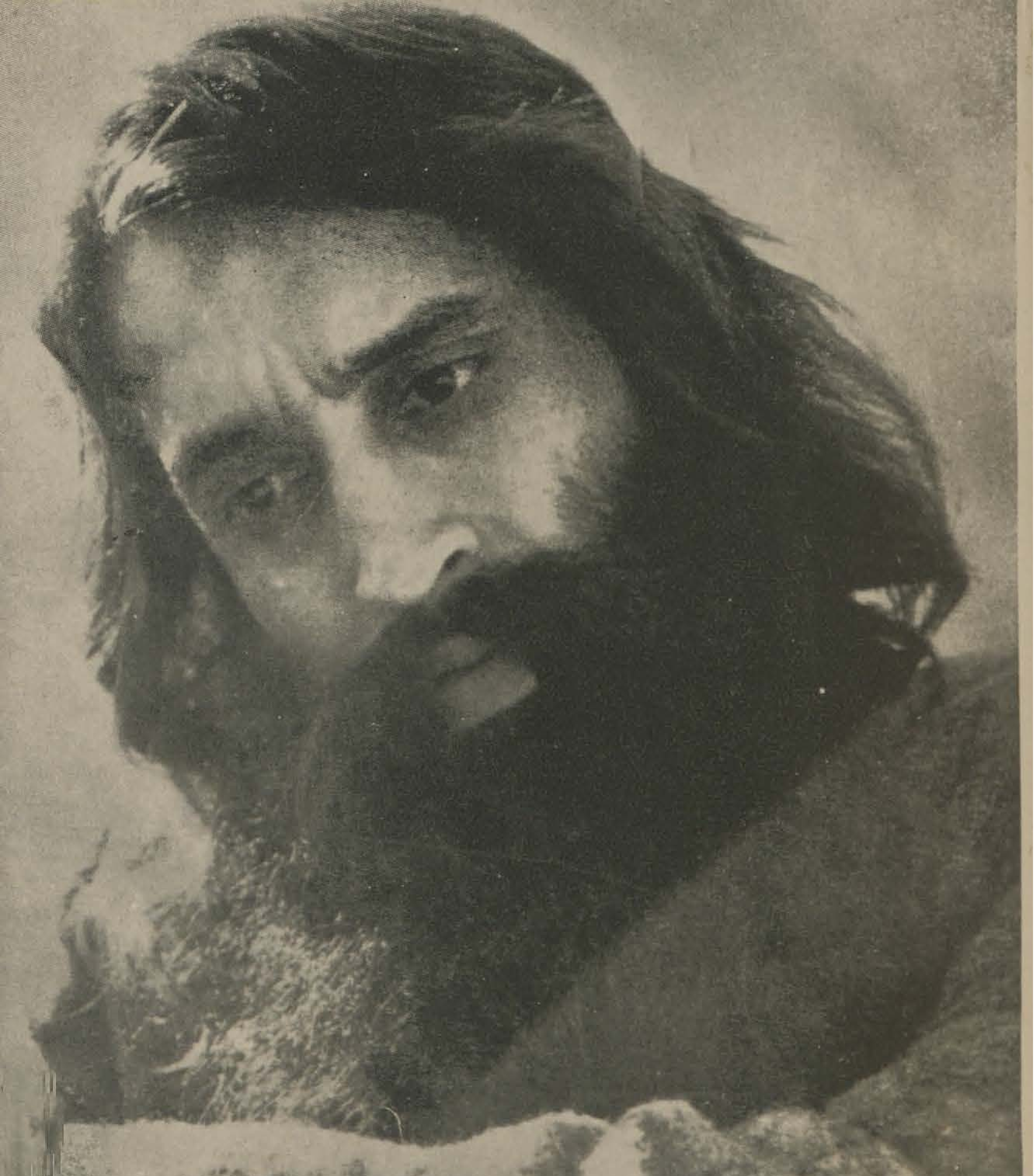


Devendra Satyarthi

MEET MY PEOPLE

by

DEVENDRA SATYARTHI

With an Introduction by

MULK RAJ ANAND

SANGAM PUBLISHERS, LTD.
LAHORE : INDIA

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1946

Printed by Mirza Mohammad Sadiq at the Ripon Printing Press, Bull Road, Lahore, and published by Devendra Stryarthi, "Janta Janta," Sant Nagar, Lahore

TO

PEARL S. BUCK

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PREFACE

My friend, Mulk Raj Anand, who has kindly contributed a thoughtful and revealing introductory essay, strongly suggested that this introduction to Indian Folk-songs should rhythmically be called *Come with Love and Meet My People*, for he said this phrase from Tagore will make it all the more significant. But I confess my inability to follow his advice, firstly because more than half the book had already been printed, and secondly the impress of the original title, during the four years since the major manuscript was sent to the press, was very deep.

The Folk-song movement has touched the remote corners of India during the last seventy-five years, since 1871, when Charles E. Gover's *The Folk-songs of Southern India* was published at Madras. We have Meghani in Kathiawar well-known for giving us thousands of old genuine folk-songs devotedly collected and edited in Gujarati; Raichura brings his own quota of Kathiawari *Doohas* and *Garba* songs. Mansuruddin and Jasimuddin have explored Bengali songs after Dinesh Chandra Sen and Chandra Kumar Dey. In the Punjab we have Ramsaran Das and Harjeet Singh, whose collections published in Punjabi show a great scientific accuracy of the texts. Ram Naresh Tripathi gave a lead in Hindi; Ram Iqbal Sinha Rakesh's work for Maithili songs, and Krisnadev Upaddhyaya's zeal for Bhojpuri songs is deep and dignified. In Rajasthan we had a trio in Suryakaran Pareek, Ram Sinha and Narottamdas Swami, though the hand of death has snatched away unluckily the first of the three friends. In place of Temple and

Grierson, we have amidst us two Englismen—Verrier Elwin, well known for his studies in the Gond anthropology and folklore, and W. G. Archer, author of *The Blue Grove*—The poetry of the Uraons, who has also published about half a dozen anthologies of songs in orginal texts collected with local collaborators among the aboriginal tribes in Santal Parganas and Chhota Nagpur.

My own collections, made during the last twenty years, range over more than fifty languages of India, and the songs number over 300,000 all told, though I have been able to publish a small number of them in my books, *Giddha* and *Deeva Bale Sari Rat* in Punjabi, *Main hun Khana-Badosh* and *Gae ja Hindustan* in Urdu, and *Dharti Gati Hai* in Hindi. My two other books, *The Plough and the Drum* and *Songs of the Indian People* revealing more Indian folk-songs, will shortly be out.

In the present book, I have included chapters on Burma and Ceylon, for to me they are parts of Greater India. I will take up Orissa and Assam, Maharashtra and Gujarat, Sind and Baluchistan and the remaining corners, especially the homelands of the aboriginal tribes, in a volume under preparation which I intend calling *Lament of the Wounded Doe.*

My thanks are due to friends all over India, Burma and Ceylon, who helped in the collection and elucidation of the songs.

Janta Janta, DEVENDRA SATYARTHI

Sant Nagar, Lahore

April 1946

INTRODUCTION

About the time when I was revising the essay which follows, after having written it during a deep, dark night on the Ganges at Kalakankar in Partapgarh District of U.P., I found myself in Santiniketan. The year was 1938, the month was December, the day was the foundation day of Santiniketan when a fair is held at the Ashram. As I walked up to the fair from the house where I was staying, dragging a little toy cart, which some of the students had presented me, I met my host Balraj Sahni with a dignified, tall young man who was afterwards introduced to me as Devendra Satyarthi, the Punjabi poet who had been collecting the folk-songs of India. My little clay cart caused the young poet some amusement. But I remember saying to him that I was carrying the first centuries behind me as he was carrying the prehistoric past in the sheaf of papers in his portfolio.

That phrase seems to me now to have become a symbol of our friendship. For, apart from the accident of chance, it seems to have become indicative of the fact that our minds were working along similar lines. While Devendra Satyarthi had been rediscovering the survivals of the most vital spoken rhythms of our past in the villages of India, I too had gone back to the sources of our folk tradition and rendered the stories, the myths and the tales in the countryside.

Since my arrival in India, after spending the war years in England, I have had the opportunity of reading Devendra Satyarthi's book, MEET MY PEOPLE, in proof. And when he suggested that I should write a foreword, I readily agreed, not to write a foreword which is a form of writing generally too patronizing, to be honest, but to contribute the essay which I had written just before I first met him. For, that essay, the sum of my meditations on a dark night on the Ganges, was a parallel development, justifying our faith in the poetry and courage of our peoples, and a narrative that would be the basis of a dignified collaboration between us. I believe that Devendra Satyarthi's translations reproduce in beautiful rhythmic prose the true genius of our bards, minstrels and popular poets and are a unique contribution to our heritage of many aspects of the life of our peoples. I offer my essay here, therefore, as a tribute to his work and to the love that we bear in common for our peoples.

The river flows sullenly through the night, filling the universe with a terrible sense of its dark potencies, spreading into the jungles and hills and inhabited plains a vast sense of doom. It is the mainstream of Hindustan. It gathers unto itself many tributaries, even as it floods the land, when it is pregnant with the meltings of the snows on the Himalayas, and flows into many little rivulets, marshes and canals. It is Ganga, flowing, they say, out of the head of Siva, the Creator, preserver and

destroyer of the universe. In it are the drops of nectar which pilgrims carry away in copper jars to drink for immortality, and in it are the specks of dust with which the incinerated ashes of the departed mingle before they are carried to the ocean. Source of life, then, and the grave of the dead, healer, reviver, as well as the carrier of the germs of ten plagues and the hundred different fevers, purifier, sustainer, killer, worshipped by millions as the Mother, the mysterious container of all the hopes, aspirations, dreams and dark unconscious of the people of Hindustan, it is a great symbol, if you like, or only a great river, which has flowed down through the ages and still flows......

I have come out to its banks in the pitch black night from the nearby village and sit gazing at it from the terrace of my host's summer house, full of 'divine discontent', but also full of a strange sense of foreboding, a deep fear. For only a hundred yards away the two dead men of the village are burning on their funeral pyres, and I have never been able to get over my terror of the jinns and bhuts and howbattas and hobgoblins with which my mother's talk and the gossip of the women in our gulley impressed me right on from my early childhood.

And yet I ought not to be afraid. For am I not a modern ? Have I not been half way round the world and dabbled in a hundred different arguments ? Have I not seen the great factories, the Sukkur Barrage which has harnessed the Indus, giant electrical works which have caught nature by the tuft knot and swung it as a juggler swings his monkey ? Do I not know something about the great struggles which are raging round the world, and even in the village behind me there ? And how events are changing man's mind revealing before his disillusioned gaze another fate, and another destiny ? Why am I afriad, then ? And of what ? Or is it merely the healthy doubt which affects my mind so ?

Of course, for moments, for long moments, I am not afraid. For the sheer fascination of the elements overwhelms me. The arrogant sound of the water is redolent of the fury with which it has carved its way down the Himalayas through gorges and glaciers. The cool snow breeze which comes wafted over it is like the balm of new life to one tormented by the heat which oozes from the sunbaked earth. The vistas of the enormous land on both sides of the river, with the groves across it in the conic cypress trees which rise and talk to the sky, the expanses of the black forests which spangle the countryside up to the ends of the horizon, are curiously soothing. And the teeming life of snoring or praying humanity, the whirring insects, the jackals which howl now and then, the dogs which bark back, and the donkeys which occasionally bray their ridiculous bray, are all reassuring...... And yet, I must confess, I am afraid. It is no use affecting a strength and a heroism when one is the slightest bit craven. It would be hypocrisy to think that everything is solid when I know that all around me the world is crumbling, when I know that there are vast vacuums of nothingness about me, crying out to be filled up. It would be a lie

to pretend that there is not going on in me the most momentous conflict, not as big quantitatively as the struggles which engulf humanity, but a miniature tussle reflecting the same contradictions between the old and the new, the past and the future, between all the 'fates' which have accrued to me and the present destiny. It is not that I have no faith in myself and my friends, that I do not believe in our capacity to resolve the shapeless experience of our lives, but the thing is to rescue the soul from the rocks of dogma in which it is rooted, to resurrect it from the swamps, the lowlands and the marshes which the Monsoons of an aeon have created around it, to take it out of this heavy dark night and to renew it. When I see it in rare moments lit like the coloured electric lamps within me then I am not afraid of the glow of those dead bodies and of the gigantic elements, but it would need the flame of a volcano inside me to consume the dreads of the past.

The river flows sullenly through the night, filling the universe with a terrible sense of its dark potencies, spreading into the jungles and hills and inhabited plains a vast sense of doom......

Let me take it into confidence. Let me ask it a few questions. Who are the dead which it commemorates with its curious intonation, its sound and fury, signifying nothing, and something ?...... Are they the cause of my anguish ?

Perhaps that is so, perhaps it is because I want to know, to feel the essence of my own life in contrast to the dead who weigh so heavily on me......

The deadliest and the heaviest weight is that of the forest there, the jungle compact and thick like the mass of a mountain in one of Nicholas Roerich's pictures. Old, old, very old, as ancient as the Himalayas, with its hoary, bearded banyans and oaks and kikars and neems, dense, dark and sombre, spreading like a vast mysterious sea of vegetation, at the bottom of which are tangled undergrowth of thorny bushes and weeds and crawling insects, life, the ferocious beat kingdom and the buried nights of history.

Those were long nights. And the jungle then was omnipresent, omniscient, dwarfing everything. And the small dark people, the neolithics, lived there, shaded from the sun which burnt the treetops, breathing the fungus odours, drinking the pungent waters of the drying pools, rather than the nectar of the nearby Ganges, exorcising their demons and propitiating the forest spirits—Yakahas, Nags, fauns and nereids......The forest was all round, it enveloped everthing......But who knows what dreams stirred the dark breath of those nights. For, with all my fears, I am a self-conscious man, heir to myriads of generations, son of two parents, grandson of four grand-parents, great-grandson of eight great-grandparents, great-great-grandson of sixteen great-great-grand-parents, and so on ad infinitum. And I have accepted each stone carved by those ancestors and all the writing on the wall, the paint on the pots and the shapes on the copper and bronze and silver and gold, not as an antique dealer accepts old merchandize believing it

to be precious merely because it is old. But because I can perceive the qualities of the heritage, shall I project myself back into the intricate processes of that time and ascertain the depths plumbed by these men in the pools, the heights reached by them above the tall stems of the calamus and bamboo grove ?

Perhaps I can venture to guess.! The demons and the good spirits they evoked evidence to a special effort on their part. And they show that they struggled, as each generation struggles to build, to be free. Else why those shrines in the caves, the little temples dug deep in the mounds of earth among the groves of mango and teak and Kadamba trees, the clearings under the magnolias, the tamarisks and the palms ?

Only, they were baulked by the spirits of the forest, by their own fears, as it were, by the gigantic expanses of greenery, the provinces of demons and witches, choked by the airless confines, overwhelmed by the oppression of endless brooding nights, hidden under the thick curtain of endless torrid days.

But they left behind prodigal works, monoliths, images of their gods, of the earth-earthy stones from which it seems that they were here only yesterday, so sharp, so tense is the outline of their sculpture, though I know they were long ago.

Before their beauty I am not really afraid. I can understand them listen to the distant voices of its creators.

And yet the river flows sullenly through the night, filling the universe with a terrible sense of its dark potencies, spreading into the jungles, the hills and the inhabited plains a vast sense of doom......

But has it always been the same ? And will it remain so ? Life changes. Everything changes. A form is born to fade away. But what was the nature of the change that happened between dim days and the first invasion of India ? Was it only an outer change ? Or did the substance change too,—the inner life ? And did the Rig Vedic shepherd sing the final song, the song of all songs ? And have two thousand years passed in vain ?......

If the mind of man is like a rich tapestry to which the donation of each previous generation makes a background, on which are superimposed the colours distilled by an individual's experience of the senses, refined by the play of the intellect and imbued, above all, by the strange tone of the will and open to sudden illuminations from the subconscious in its creative moments, then it is possible for man to grow, to extend himself from the provinces to the 'metropolis', to merge his ego in a super-individual effort, to be a new man, to glow with all the neon lights in himself, so that he can see his way in the dark and show others the way......

Certainly the nomadic herdsmen who wandered down from Central Asia, (or was it Norway ?) began to think about the structure of their being, questioned being itself and sang the hymn of creation, surely the greatest early poem of the world !

How subtle, how exalted is the conception of the universe as born of desire in the mind of God, how satisfying the notion of the return through desire, the reciprocal urge! Anticipation of the voluptuous ecstasy! Of one and the Many! Also a transcendentalism so vertical that it is still with us......The earth-man of the forests has travelled far and deep. And, as the formation of an idea, and its transformation in song involves the fusion of so many impluses and acts, of so much experience, and vital flame, one wonders what magic was in the senses of these men. And what daring! What courage!

But, all the same, why am I not content to sing their songs? Why do I find it a little unsatisfying even to rest with them? Am I greedy for more? Why do I crave greater ecstasies of fulfilment? Is it the primitive faculty in me, classifying the various sense impressions and according to them a place in the sequence without a thought of essences?

No. It is not that. But I have the feeling that it is difficult to adopt an honest attitude towards the billions of souls who make up the past. Some of our moderns are inclined to borrow things from the ancients and recommend us to adopt them. I prefer to see the development as it happened. It seems to me that the earth was still slumbering in the spell of deep dark nights and the angry glare of red-eyed days when the Aryans followed down to the delta of the Ganges. And fear was abroad, the fear of the elements, the Sun, the Moon, the mountains, the rivers, the rains, the drought, the stormy winds and the stars. The challenge of this outside world could not be denied, nor could the dread course of this natural phenomena be directly altered, stopped or modified. And as man gazed upon the fruitful fields he tilled on the clearings, he could not but feel a superstitious awe of these outside forces. And the only way that he could establish his sway on his own stricken soul was by placating the dread elements with hymns and songs and prayers, half importunate appeal, half currying favours with the gods to help him out. The beasts of the jungle kingdom, too, were a menace. Hence the veneration of animal gods. Birds of prey abounded, and swooped down on pet animals. They also became gods, good spirits or evil spirits according to the use they had for man, symbols of wealth or fertility, token, charms and tavizes.

At least that is how it seems to have happened from the spring rhythms of the country songs.

The network of the fungus still grows. And presumably the inherited fears and the wisdoms wrung out of defeat and despair, or speculations born of brave flights of fancy, have added themselves as accretions to later thought. Hence our own fears.

What then is the sum of these vast conglomerations of sentiments, sayings, aphorisms, monologues, dialogues and compositions which form the Upapishads, the forest books which record the thoughts of the hermits and the sages who contemplated in and

around the villages ? Merely the dramatisation of the primeval processes or a series of creative myths, showing man's search for the meaning of life, for the symbol, the sign, the sound ?

The sheer dark wall of Nature which is so eloquent in the night can alone answer these questions. Seemingly unchanging and unchangeable, this tropical world suggests a polar conception of thought in which the Omnipotent is supreme like a fixed umbrella casting the shadow of its protection over all, governing the processes of birth and rebirth in a space which is also time. And the whole pageant is enacted in the eyes of this great God, beyond history and beyond the development of techniques. And this remains so for nearly three thousand years, making for one of the longest cosmic traditions in the world.

Was there, then, no striving on the part of man in these many centuries ?

Undoubtedly the very foundation of this vertical Vedantic idea was the result of a conflict between the fair Aryans who began to invade India about 2000 B.C. and the Dravidians, the dark resisters. The result of this *struggle*, which lasted till 1000 B.C., was the domination of the indigenous 'coloured' peoples by the white intruders, and then the ultimate conquest of the conqueror by the deeper and more intricate culture of the conquered. Amid the vortex of the warring factions I can see the skulls that broke and the blood that flowed down this river, and I can hear the groans of the helpless sufferers. But the contradiction between truth and falsehood is soon destroyed by the *force majeure* of Nature's dread energies. Also, the mixture of life with life, the fraternisation inevitable after every war, is the compeller of synthesis.

It is true that the possessors of the tallest ambitions succeeded in India, for the old Brahmins imposed their will on all and sundry. But already in 600 B.C. the ground was slipping from under their feet, for the sciens of the Aryan warrior caste, the Kshattriyas, were leading the revolt against the priestcraft. The humanism of the Buddha is the quintessence of all the resentments of a thousand years of needless pain, the protest of that young world against the concentration of spiritual and temporal power into the hands of a few even as it is an attempt to inform the moral code with the sanction of an ultimate tenderness. 'What ought to be done is neglected, says a Buddhist scripture, 'what ought not to be done is done', 'the desires of unruly, thoughtless peoples are always increasing'.

Who knows what other determinations remained still-born in those authoritarian kingdoms, where only a Gautama, a king's son, could dare to protest ? And what were the thoughts of men at the publication of the oracular code of the Brahmin law-giver Manu ? Did anyone protest against the principles of Kautilya's political tract, the *Artha-shastra ?*

I see the bubbling of many hearts with secret hopes. I see

much coming and going among the retreats of the sages in the mountains. I hear the lashing of tongues in argument.

But against the Omnipotent God, Brahma, the Supreme symbol, who is the chief incarnation of all other gods, Vishnu, Indra, Siva, all protest is futile. And against the omnipresent caste system, with the Brahmins, the officiators at all ceremonies and the holders of the conscience of God, there is no avail except submission. So that only a few years after his death the one God idea is fastened upon the doctrines of the Buddha, who never asserted such a metaphysical belief. And the earning of a higher life through good deeds, the road to *moksha*, release, whlch Gautama emphasized, is soon used to show that the lower castes deserve their fate in this world because of the evils they have committed in the past.

Sponge-like and enervating, Hinduism absorbed all the highest speculations of the human spirit, as well as its lowest superstitions. And, with a profound grasp of the psychology of the human mind, it conceded a place to the weakest of the weak, so that it has worn the air of an extraordinary tolerance for generations. And by the time that the Muhammadan invasions began in 1000 A.D. it has penetrated into the nooks and crevices of the Indian plateau so deeply that it is not yet shaken except on the fringes, and persists : 'Abhor those who join gods to God ! cried the sons of Prophet. And they struck with fire and sword against the Kafirs. But the cosmic conception which saw the essence of all things in the changeless principle who assumed the shapes desired by each worshipper has survived until today !

The river flows, the mainstream, gathering unto itself all the rivulets, all the currents, dominating the imaginations of men, stifling their hearts and then releasing them through a new sweep of its sustaining spirits, a concession to the human heart......

Sometimes I cannot believe that the spell of the Omnipotent could have lasted so long. The segments of many months repeating the old hymns !......Was there no discontent ?

The secret of this continued acceptance lies probably in the satisfaction of needs. In this gigantic village of India, composed of hundreds and thousands of villages and hamlets, no one owned anything and yet everyone owned everything, for everyone, both Raja and Ryot, had only a right to the enjoyment of the fruits of the land, but no one owned property. The Raja supplied protecttion for revenue in kind and saw to it that the tracks were kept passable, canals dug, and public works initiated. The Ryot tilled the field allotted to his family. The land was freshly redivided after each conquest by the five elders of the village. The place of every new-born infant in the community was assigned, fixed. The chief enemies were still the drought, the winds, the rains and thunderstorms. The fate of Man seemed to be governed by the gigantic forces of Nature, which had to be appeased. And the psychology of Hindu ritualistic worship ensured the blessings of Almighty by the use of the most sonorous chants, the most lovely

hymns and lovelier idols. Self-hypnosis was the highest ideal, the mergence of man with the highest self, the conquest of fear, the tearing of the sheets of illusion created by earthly desire, with a view to the attainment of fusion with the ultimate reality.

The course of this aristocratic democracy knew no alternation, except that of the day and night, until our time. Kings came and Emperors went, but the slow routine of this secret life went on, on the sides of the mainstream, among the stony ridges as well as in the festering backwaters, among the forests as well as the marshes, uninterrupted. And the accepted values of this culture built up by these peasant communities are the values of a well-disciplined people, the fruit of the accumulated labour of generations, the product of a long and conscious choice between the attempt at form and the desire for renewal, resulting in a high degree of self-restraint. It is a great tradition, simple, sensuous, self-sufficient and sensitive in the deepest sense, and, what is more, it is a singing tradition.

It is not surprising that it absorbed all the invaders, except the last, the Westerners. In its own peculiar way it was a generous culture, like the land in which it sprang up, accepting everything and making room for divergences of view.

Certainly, the only great challenge for fifteen hundred years, the sword of Islam, ended here by becoming only the crescent moon, a mere symbol of truth, only another of the many symbols, for its belief in a personal God, the Brahmins argued, was already contained in the several monotheistic strains of Hinduism. As for the laws and customs of Islam, so humane, so enlightened in the sanction they drew from the brotherhood of man, and in the recognition of the rights of women,—even these were tinged in the long run by the Hindu code, because of the taboos which the closely-knit, indigenous society imposed against the invading faith. So much so that before the passage of a few centuries the idea of caste had been carried like a bacillus into Islam by the millions of converts whom the fear of poll-tax or other disabilities had taken over to the alien religion under the Pathans and the Moghuls......And though the priestcraft of both faiths drew the asteriks of doubt over this jumbling of Hinduism and Islam, the polychromatic images resolved the doubts, bridged the fears, and led to miracles of art which are the joint product of Hindu and Muhammadan sensibility, such as the folk-songs.

But if we want to see how not a mere idea but the actual force of an historical urge alone can create the real impact, let us look for a moment and see how the star which rose in Bethlehem remained merely the smallest speck among the constellations on the horizon of Hindustan, until the fear of the imperialist sword baptised a few heathen according to the rites of Christian civilization.

The gospel of goodwill to men and peace on earth was first proclaimed by the angels to the shepherds. And these simple

men went about spreading the glad tidings of the incarnation of Lord Jesus Christ. And soon the influence of this gospel was felt throughout the greater part of the world then known to the Roman conquerors before the end of the first century. It is even asserted that the apostle Thomas was put to death by the Brahmins of Mylapur, while he was labouring for the new faith near Madras. About the fourth century a number of Syrian Christians are said to have settled along the coast of Malabar, south-west of India. They earned great favours from the Hindu Kings of Malabar and freely travelled about in the country. Soon they increased in numbers and wealth, so much so that they had their own princes to rule over them for centuries to come. But though it was the duty of every individual Christian who had embraced the ennobling religion of Jesus to endeavour to spread the knowledge of the Lord, Christianity never really gained a real foothold on this continent, even though so many bodies among the outcasts sorrowed for a eucharist. No, it was left to the buccaneering Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, French and English seamen and merchant adventurers to bring the everlasting knowledge of God, as taught by the son of God, to the tropical firmament. And apart from the influence exerted by the Jesuits at the Court of the Great Moghuls it was the establishment of the English factories on the coast of Coromendal, on the south coast and in Bengal that made the modern Padre-Sahib a familiar phenomenon, the only good man in the camp of the bad. To the extent to which the missionary could dispel the fear of the white man created in the minds of the natives by his word-brandishing compatriots, he was able to put over the meaning of the Cross. But, as the more honest missionaries will admit, the result of two centuries of proselytising has not been worthy of the great ideal which they sought to perach because of the taint of imperialism which attached to the words of one of the tenderest of men. Meanwhile, they sound rather ridiculous because they cannot make the choice which C. F. Andrews or Verrier Elwin made, to stand aside from falsehood and the white Sahib's ballyhoo. And they chant despairingly :

'But the end is not—Look onward,
Much must yet be done ;
Millions, yet still unbelieving,
Must be sought and won.
Disappointment will be waiting,
Satan does his best
Yet all obstacles must vanish
At our God's behest.'

The great river flows............

And so long as the European Christian missionaries speak of fighting against the heathen and think of their work as a civilising mission like the Crusaders, they will not cut much ice in the land. It is unfair, of course, to judge the Crusaders too harshly. They knew no better. But when will the contemporary Western Christian

realise that Christianity incorporates beliefs and rules of conduct which were held thousands of years before Christ was born and that he is not the only son of God, nor the religion he preached the only religion ?

'As one can ascend to the top of a house by means of ladders or a bamboo or a staircase or a rope, so diverse are the ways and means of approaching God, and every religion in the world shows one of these ways. Different creeds are but different paths to reach the Almighty !' So said Rama Krishna, the modern Hindu sage. And it is obvious that the wider view of the neo-Hindus seems more gracious to most people than the fanatical zeal of the hypocritical white-collar representatives of the master race, often the living negation of the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, the servants of tyrannical states based on the superiority of the white man above all. What a mockery the words of gentle Jesus sound in their beefy mouths : Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.......

But the utopias which glow in the night will not come about, neither Christian nor Hindu, nor the theocracy of Islam. The engineers further up have been diverting the water of this river in a thousand canals. And several railway bridges span this great waterway, defying all the spirits which, it was said, would smite the evil scions of the Iron age !...... And we are in such a perilous position that if we merely stand aside and look on from the backwaters at our glorious past even as we see ourselves dragged in dull consent along the new roads, we are doomed to suffer the fate reserved for the tired and the unwilling, the sulking and the eternally frightened despairers of history.

I am calm when I say this, though I do not deny that I feel a certain heat in my body, the combustion of a silent anger at the frustration that is inevitable to slaves.

But I have roamed round the highways of the world, thought deeply, and listened to the voices of others. And in making up my mind I find that I am aware of all the complexities of the crisis of our modern world, that I have a good view of great river as well as of the swamps and backwaters. So let not my friends accuse me of rashness and dogmatism !

India was far ahead of Europe in many ways because it had a longer history, but equally it has been for a long time in putrescent decay. The powerful Imperial dynasties of Asia, with their immense frontiers and poor communications, with their vast populations perennially in need of irrigation works, and their treasures half empty through the splendours living of their Kings, were fissiparious, while the comparatively smaller European states, though much more ephemeral, developed more closely-knit economies and more dynamic cultures.

Feudalism in India, therefore. created its own nemesis through the unlimited lusts for power of the great princes and noblemen and the continual frustrations of the peasantry. And as the tiny

top layer squeezed the villages dry of ever larger stocks of grain either in the form of rent or plunder, there began that extraordinary separation in the culture of the Indian peoples, the division of the fine, exalted court art and literature, and the rich, human, intense, primitive folk art of the village, essentially an art of revolt though not untinged by pessimism in view of the harsh experiences of the peasantry through famine, drought, disease, and war.

The two strains of the court art and popular art remain distinct except when the top layer, in danger of losing its souls, seeks to re-establish contact with the perennial source of all culture in the songs, dances and other rhythmical expressions of the people. For folk art is always sincere and spontaneous, in so far as it is the collective art of a whole people, the quintessence of the philosophy of a race, the expression of its most intimate joys and sorrows employing the imagery, the archaisms, the virile dialect words, the tonality and the rhythms born of the living contact of men and women with spinning wheels and swords, with ploughs and handlooms, with good and evil spirits.

Over both these patterns of culture the orthodox idea of the One God reigns supreme, the all-enveloping, authoritarian principle in the name of which the priestly oligarchy is able to dominate the landscape. The abstract conception of the Supreme Being is, of course, watered down into concrete shapes, and concessions are made to those who can only see through images of wood and stone, and a very intricate and subtle ritual of conch-shells and gaudy clothes and brass bells is evolved. And, through an insistence on *moksha*, release, through working one's passage home through the various incarnations, the roots of a fundamental pessimism are planted among the oppressed. So much so that, on the face of it, here in India the very idea of change in the Western sense, that is to say enrichment through development, seems never to have occurred at all. For as soon as the hold of the priestcraft tends to slacken through the wearisomeness of their respective codes, they seem to strengthen their hold by returning to the starting point by an integral revivalism. But the superficial view, which judges India's heritage by merely loooking at the dominating orthodox culture, ignores the restless undercurrents, the fluid streams of impulses and idea which flowed away from the mainstream, the great river. The very enrichment of the Hindu pantheon with the myriad symbols of the heterodox cults, the snake gods, the tree gods, the river deities, the tree spirits and the various forms of the mother cult, and the very concentration on philosophies, shows that among the byways men were evolving new faiths to express new needs and new energies. Certainly, most of the great medieval moments, Vaishnavaism, Saivasim, Saktism, Sikhism, and the varions mystic religions were the expressions of popular revolts, new conceptions of new communities intent on improving and recasting the caste society even though under the banner of a new way to salvation.

But what revolutions have there been ? And what violent upheavals of down driven peoples against the Brahmin overlords ? And how did the Elders succeed in deceiving themselves and others, so that they handed down to succeeding generations an apparent stability of belief ? Did the white beards in their crafty wisdom always accept the worship of gods whom they had, at first, barely tolerated ? All these questions remain unanswered, except in the sudden ejaculatory rhythms of the folk-songs and fighting ballads. And the survival of many gods points to the presence of other egos than merely the Brahmin Ego. And the multifarious art movements below the surface show the continuous efflorescence of new vital sensibilities proclaiming a new way of life. And the legendary denigration of the Indian tradition as closed, static and moribund becomes a falsity. For how, without the processes of revolt and change and continuous *struggle*, has Indian civilisation survived at all when, in the words of the poet Iqbal, 'Greece and Rome and Babylon lie dead' ?

The river flows sullenly through the night, filling the universe with a terrible sense of its dark potencies, spreading into jungles and hills and inhabited plains a vast sense of doom...... And it seems to triumph over everything else.

But, as the black night becomes less black, the triumph of the river does not seem very impressive. For I can begin to see the byways now and hear the swish of the tributary streams. And in my imagination the myths born in the forests, the impulses of men seeking to live in spite of absolutism, the remnants of life *struggling* against convention, the people with their affiliations with fear and allegiancies to sorrow, their determination to fight in spite of continual defeats and always singing—they begin to loom large before my eyes, with their feet dug in the earth, like monoliths struggling to beat back onslaught from the top.

And it is this *struggle* of the vast expanses against the great river that becomes of consequence to me today, the conflict of the intricate, chaotic, restless life in the tributaries against the mainstream, an eternal struggle, if you like, but one which recurs in our time in an entirely new shape.

The next conquerors are not emperors, nor kings, nor even the foolish old wise men. They are the bulls and bears on the Stock Exchange, they are bankers, *big-businessmen*, they are a number of robbers turned princes, they are landlords, industrialists, rulers statesmen, of varying colour and shades of opinion. And they have spanned the river with a number of bridges in order to ensure complete mastery of the mainstream at its most critical bends. And what is more, they own the motive power necessary to secure their suzerainty over it, to collect the loot, to assimilate the produce of the forests, plains and hills, as well as the man-power of the villages around it.

And there has been no triumphant conquest like this in the whole long four thousand years' life of this country, no such

mastery of all the multifarious strains of thought and feeling and belief by a completely new Omniscient, Omnipresent God, Money or the cash-nexus. This Absolute spirit which has undermined the whole basis of human existence to-day, which has corroded the whole basis of group life, which survived floods, droughts, famines and local wars. because no one owned anything now threatens to divest the citizen of all honour and dignity by isolating each individual, by buying off some to exalt the others, and by squeezing out the very corpuscles of red blood by selling death to the vast mases by advertising it as life, with the help of the most ingenious devices of propaganda and publicity. The high priests of this new religion, the Directors of Monopolies and Cartels, the controllers and contractors, the black marketeers, have inventories far more intricate than the Brahmins ever kept, accounts books in which each soul is made to show a long series of items on the debit side and preferably nothing on the credit side. The tyranny and the fear they inspire in the multitude has within a few generations destroyed the self-sufficiency of the village communities and reduced men to the status of dead souls.

And in the face of this triumph the debacle of man, puny man, always concerned with the here and now, is almost final unless he takes charge, captures this six thousand year old civilisation and gives it a new shape and a new meaning.

If the terrors of the landscape continue to dominate men's minds in this land, if the Bania, the Raja and the Stock Exchange continue to rule the roost, then it is likely that the aeons will continue to mirror celestial laws in a cosmos full of empty houses but no men. There has never been a time when the cynics have had more justification to pronounce the imminent doom of our civilisation. For the towers have been falling before our disillusioned eyes, the lights have been going out, and we are threatened with more blackouts through bigger and more scientific holocausts. But may it all not have been just a curtain-raiser to the drama of a new renaissance ?.........

Certainly, the introduction of a new technique alters everything. And even the undertakers of civilisation have not been able to prevent the rise of great new populations from the nomads and serfs of bygone days, from among the small groups of the earth scratchers who eked a bare living out of the soil to the tune of a song. And, though the triumphant Egos have spat poison and death often enough, it is strange how they have ended in the dust, and how, always, out of their death a new life has started.

I learnt this truth in the catacombs of Europe, where the 'Fate' of the early Greeks, Xenophanes and Anexagoras, not unlike the dread deities of the Aryan-Dravidian civilisation, gave place, through the abundant harvests of villages and the city states, to the Sophist belief in Man as the Measure of the Universe; when, in spite of the emphasis placed now on the impersonal

Absolute Cosmic view and then on the human, the godliness o. reason and the beauty of the vital flame was asserted. But in the prison of the new 'Fate' in the darkness of these wars through which we are groping towards the as-yet-unknown vacuums of the future, hardly able to keep our heads above the blood, the mud and the water, it is difficult for men to grasp the revolutions by which men achieved more in six thousand years than in the previous six hundred thousand. And even they who have inherited the light of the Renaissance and the Reformation in their eyes are weary and *blinded* !......

Perhaps the dialectic of change is very subtle. Things seem to vary ever so little on the surface, and the inner change is almost incomprehensible. Specially in our day, the complex gamut of reality has shown such dramatic changes in the outer world that we ask if our inner selves have changed at all. It was easy for Heraclius to see the water pass under the bridges and to proclaim that nothing was ever the same. Also, he could feel the glow of the fire as barbarism and savagery had vanished almost before his eyes, and a new civilisation had begun to burgeon. But with us there is the polarity of idea and idea, the contradictions which we have inherited from the different 'Fates' of mankind,—from bygone empires, dead churches, freebooters, traders, missionaries, old revolutionaries, superstitious tribes, powerful nations, intriguing politicians, armament kings, federations of industries, chairmen of committees, Kaisers, Maharajas, Lenin, Stalin, Gandhi, Roosevelt, Winston, Churchill and not to forget Hitler and Mussolini. And though we can see the facts, which transform the life of man more dramatically, the causality of ideas is unrevealed, except to Shaw's Methusaleh.

In fact, however, the range of processes is only too obvious. The whole of history is like Tennyson's 'flower in the crannied wall, if I could know thee, I could know all'......' And so we have to speak in riddles which foam upwards. But, all the same, we know that large volumes of water have flowed down the Ganges, and that there is change, and that the inner change is more integral. And we can dismiss those who still say that human nature is unchangeable as idiots or mornes whose business in life is to remain self-involved to pervert words or to bluff the voters.

The essence of man's struggle today, therefore, lies in his self-consciousness, in his awareness of his dignity, and in his will to *struggle*.

The river flows......

But I have still indelibly printed in my mind the first words of that song, uttered in the years of my childhood by that Punjabi firebrand, Ajit Singh :

'Steady, steady, O keep hold of the turban on your head,
O peasant !

I have always considered those words the simple testament of the whole of our people's struggle. The turban, the three yards of homespun, which is the symbol of dignity, has been coming undone on the peasant's head for a long time. And it is about time he restored its folds so that it is set like a crown on his brow !......It is time that the half-dead ryot, kicked about by the Rajah and spat upon by the Bania, began to hit back. For if the truth be told, he has really been half-dead these many years, in spite of his brave gestures. So feeble had he become through the corruption of power imposed on him that when he was stricken with famine he just lay down and let the vultures come and gnaw on his bones. True the beasts of prey abound in our land. But I think, we have too often let the Lords' Lord rule over us without a protest, hoping for the revenge which nature has always taken on the great in ultimately making them fall. We must realise also that we have too often listened to evil counsels. And, since our rulers broke the basis of our common life, we have not found the cohesion necessary for the struggle. For we cannot fight separately—that way lies disintegration and death: and to give the big heave, to push the weight of our shoulders so that we can clear the ground, demands unity. We cannot remain sunk in the apathy of animals.

For, whatever our ancestors have proved or not proved, they showed that though they shared with animals the life of nature, man grew to be the great diviner, the magician, the poet, the husbandman who could control the wind and the rain, the fire and the water, with tools and machines while the animals, who live on the bounty of nature, could not. And beyond the plough and the wooden wheel with which he secured food and water, man saw that he could control the hereditary and environment of which he was a subject. Else, why all those collations of mood and sentiments, of ideas and emotions which make for change ? Why all those mirrors of gestures and the elaborate hymns and spells and poems of the sheerest ecstasy glorifying the *struggle ?*

The river flows sullenly through the night......But out of the darkness of the night the light must be born......

And though I feel humble in the face of the great effort that is needed to seize the unborn moment, I have a deep feeling that it will not be Shankara or Patanjali whom we must invoke today, for they are part of us, but address ourselves to the flux itself, here and now, if the fight is in us still and the flame burning. For, not only must we hold our consciences, our views of virtue and vice, but the great truth must dawn on us of which the Engineers, who have opened the canal further up the river, seem to have some inkling, that the elements, fire, water, steam and air, can be harnessed to produce wheat and rice, that tractors give life, that our smallest rivers are the reservoirs of some of the greatest power on earth, as our oceans of story are the source of our deepest and most human wisdom if we can control our hearts and minds.

Is this too great a break from the thinking habits of our past? Am I being impatient? Is there an egoism in me which is but the counterpart of the Egos I have set my heart to destroy? Do I deny too much and accept a nebulous future?

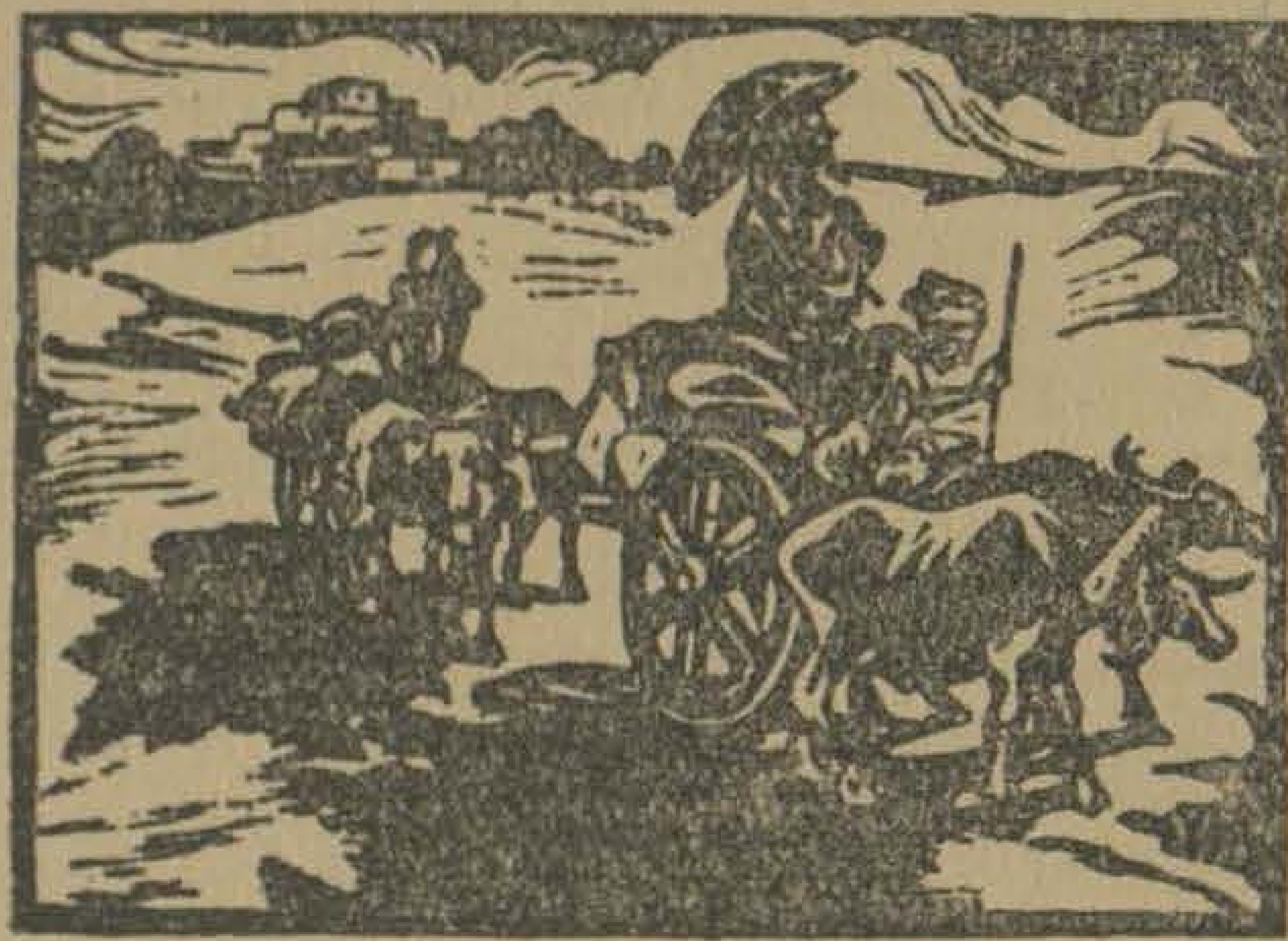
I am not baulked by all these questions, because I do not propound a programme for a million years. Nor have I many illusions in this universe of the dead and alive. The dreams of my troubled nights only suggest the struggles of tomorrow. Sprung from the soil, a little way away from the mainstream, I am inured to taking long breaths. And I know that in the village there, under the shadow of the palace and beyond the Dak Bungalow, there is the organized might of the Kisan Sabha, defeated in many battles, but tempered in the struggle, and with its banners held aloft, demanding bread and justice, the chief aspirations of the human soul.

The river flows......

I see more and more of my brethren come out of that village with prayers and songs on their lips, more and more men coming to the surface of life, singing eternally, singing songs of their struggle......

Lahore
April 1946

MULK RAJ ANAND,



MEET MY PEOPLE

"...folklore is material about the hopes and yearnings of the people ......so necessary and important for the study of their psychology......"

—LENIN

"At present the Indian villager is very much in the public eye. His economic condition is a favourite theme of politicians, his social customs are eagerly recorded by anthropologists. But very few of those who talk so readily about the dumb masses or toiling millions seem to think of them as real people, real as themselves. The villager is an object of interest, even of pity, but he is in another order of mankind......Beneath the apparently bovine monotony of his life there is a rich vein of pleasure and excitement, and this excitement, expressed in music and song, is his culture."

—VERRIER ELWIN

1

My village, my nest

I

HERE is a broad, open, wind-swept Panjáb countryside. Fallow fields interspersed with patches of sand meet the sunburnt horizon. Furrows develop into waves of sand and embrace the distant Panj Kalyán sand-hills. The western wind is the naughty mother of many a sand-storm. A storm may be all bloody, or it grows darker and darker, fast-approaching. Every year brings the Panj Kalyán sand in a good quantity, some of which may even return to its own home riding on the wings of another wind. *Nherí kitthon utthí ?—Kalyánán de tibbián ton*, *i.e.*, " whence did rise the sand-storm ?"—" From the sand-hills of Kalyán," says a significant proverb, now used to satirise the mischief-monger.

The whole region must have been a big forest at one time. The *kîkar*, the *jand* and the *shísham* would spring up once again everywhere if the axe and the plough retire. They still grow, however, on the boundaries and by the paths. Even a few remnants of the ancient forest survive where the local *Sardárs*, or landlords, go for hunting excursions.

Trees are cut every year. The animals and birds are hunted every season. Death comes to men themselves, perhaps with lesser intervals, and they are taken away by uncured diseases, snake-bites, or cold-blooded murders. Trees spring up again and again. The deer and

the hare, the dove and the pigeon multiply. And women maintain the human population.

The earth forms a natural background against which trees and animals, birds and men appear in common struggle—an ancient scroll upon which figures are written and rewritten.

"How are you, my children ? Your joys are my joys: your sorrows my sorrows : and your songs drink my own milk," the earth seems to say. And generations of man have cherished their song-heritage through centuries.

The songs and dances and legends are all fertile like the earth. On dance festivals there runs a new blood in the people's veins. They dance as though to declare their freedom. The heart of the earth pulses to the beat of folk-song, as it does in every peasent dance. The minstrel and the story-teller command every man and woman.

Time moves slowly like the ancient traditions. Songs and dances and legends gather new weight as the bee-hives grow richer in honey. The people instinctively take to appreciation of life, though the struggle for bread is difficult and seems to dry up the currents of joy. Cries against God and man explain their economic condition. The new age is touching the fringe of this countryside.

Here is Bhadaur, my village birthplace. It reflects the memory of old Bhadra Pur. *Bhadra* has more than one meaning : 'the cultured or well-educated,' 'beneficent', 'stately', 'gentle', 'the god Siva', 'a mythological elephant', 'the Mount Sumeru', 'gold' and lastly 'the shaving of hair and moustaches.' Two miles towards the west of the present site of the village, the King Bhadra Sen founded Bhadra Pur, the nerve-centre of a Rájput state. It must be centuries ago when even Prithvi Ráj had not come to the throne of Delhi. Grandfathers still talk of the old treasures of Bhadra Sen that lie buried under the fields, though none would set out

to dig the earth for the ancient gold *mohurs*.

I dream of the King Bhadra Sen and the lotus-eyed Suchitrá who danced the best peacock-dance and sang the most poignant songs to Indra, the rain god, who in those days sent more rain. Suchitrá was turned into a she-snake by the curse of a hermit whom she annoyed by hiding his loin-cloth while he was taking his bath in the river. The river, too, disappeared by his curse. When Suchitrá begged, he said : " My curse I can't take back. A great man will pass this way one day. He'll give your deliverance." The hermit's curse, the legend maintains, soon brought the downfall of the King Bhadra Sen.

Bhadra Pur shifted to a new site under the new name of Mallu Gill ; a mile and a half from the present village. Later on many a Mallu Gill peasant was killed in a blood fued under the burning, summer sun. The frightening ghostly cries of "Killed, killed, killed', Going going, going', and 'Water, water water', are still heard sometimes as some peasant would tell you, reminding the village of the old tragedy.

Mallu Gill shifted to the present site returning again to the old name that soon cooled down to a new variant —Bhadaur, which still echoes the ancient Bhadra Pur. It was probably a century before the dawn of the Mogul Empire in India. Much of the village that developed later was covered by a forest.

An old martyr of the Bámiáná Shrine, situated about a couple of miles away where our fields meet the fields of Saido village is still remembered in old legend. He was Bámá, one of the Mallu Gill heroes. Even after his head was cut off, he went on fighting. And Bámiáná, known after him, is the place where he fell down fighting. After every marriage, the peasants of Saido village send the boy and his bride to seek the

blessings of the old martyr, and every year, before the wheat is reaped, a fair is held at the holy place.

The forefather of the local *Sardárs* was Rámá, the son of Bábá Phool. He was invited by the people themselves and they had all agreed to give him a share of the harvest every time. The outlaws used to rob the people. Rama saved them from such sufferings.

The village *Gurdwáṛá* is still alive with old memories. It was only a mud-house of Bábá Charan Dás in the olden days, amidst the trees. Guru Govind Singh came to see the Bábá one day and stayed in a tent near the pond, now known as *Sat Guryání* after the Guru's visit. A she-snake was seen rushing towards the Guru, who told his soldiers not to harm her. She came and put her head on the guru's feet and died. On the Guru's command, the dead body of the she-snake was buried at Bábá Charan Dás's place. She was Suchitrá, daughter of King Bhadra Sen. The promised great man came and gave her deliverance. *Sappan di Samádh*, or the she-snake's tomb, inside the *Gurdwárá*, is still regarded with religious respect.

II

My forefathers were camel-drivers. Big caravans of camels joined Kabul with this countryside. The old trade saw its downfall as the English Ráj stretched its arms this way. My grandfather was a child then. He studied Persian and became a *Patwárí*.[1]

The camel-driver's theme is still alive in the *Giddhá* that is danced with the ancient spirit :

In a camel-driver's family, marry me not, mother,
Waking up at dawn they'll go with the caravan,

[1] A minor revenue official.

O they'll even miss my *Mukláwá* day[1].

The blood of the camel-drivers flows in my veins and it strengthens my travel-lust somehow. The far-away horizon lights my imagination, the old camel-bells ring in my ears. I am not a caravan man now, yet the memories of caravan age keep flooding through my soul. And I am always on the move, as if I were a real gypsy.

The dream of old forest life I never forget. I measure it by the power of songs about trees. The opening lines of an English song come to my mind again and again :

> " I know that I can never see
> A poem lovely as a tree..........."

The old banyan stands near the bridge of the village canal that brings the water of the Satluj. I can read years written on its aging flesh. But the oldest banyan of my village stands far away from the canal besides the pond that receives half the water of the village during the rains. Deep inside, I love every tree of this colony of my forefathers. When my lovely *Neem* fell down, I felt the same sorrow that I would feel over the death of an aunt. The lemons, the mangoes, the pomegranates, the peaches, the *jámuns* in the canal garden still call me outstretching their arms as they did in my childhood days. And the *Pípal* near my house looks at me smilingly as it stands all bathed in gold at morning.

Noorá, the shepherd, my old playmate, still sings his favourite song :

> O dry *pípal* leaf, why are you rustling ?
> Fall now, old leaf,
> Lo, the season of new leaves has come.

Like Homer, Noorá, as he takes to his age-old song, seems to believe that the race of mankind is like the

[1] When the bride goes for the second time to her father-in-law's.

leaves of a *pípal.* One day he too will have to leave his tree like a dry leaf.

The whole countryside is still called in the neighbourhood, *Jangal.* Noora is *Jangalí* or jungle-dweller and like his great-grandfather, whose songs and legends have come to him across the generations, he is more or less a pantheist in his thoughts. The old spirit of the jungle stirs in the songs and legends of the sons of the soil ; they have always sung with a mystic ecstasy.

Trees, too, sing, Noora would tell you. His songs illustrate his view :

> Listening to the songs of the trees,
> My heart is illumined.

Or :

> The *pípal* sings, the banyan sings,
> And the green mulberry, too :
> Stop, traveller, and listen,
> Your soul will be set right.

Every tree is a son of the earth. Every tree has a spirit. A patient listener, every tree knows the secrets of man. Says the French proverb : "The forest that ever listens, has the secret of all mystery." Beware, for the soul of some dead person may be living in an old *pípal* or banyan tree. I have heard the old people saying, though I have not seen it myself, that the soul of a dead person living in a tree can, at times, turn into a fairy and on a moonlit night enchant a passer-by. And the tree where a soul lives delights in its magic dance. Inspired by the flying carpet of legends, as Noorá went on speaking, I at once remembered having read somewhere of a Swedish ballad that told of a nymph's play ; as she played the leaves of the trees danced in harmony with her steps.

Noorá remembers the legend of a maiden, whom her brothers' wives murdered in cold blood. She was transformed into a tree that told her sad tale to the passers-by. Life continues, somehow, even after death, so Noorá has found in his legends. Yes, life knows no death. Life persists. The tree that sprung from the blood of the maiden mystically symbolizes it.

Sikandar, as Alexander the Great is called in India, has touched the fringe of the legends. On the bank of the Beás there was a *pípal* tree two hundred years old. Under the influence of the full moon, it was able to predict, speaking in a human voice. This tree knew Sanskrit as well as a Pandit. Sikandar came to it and said : "Tell me, O *Pípal*, my destiny." "Never again will you see your dearest home," spoke the tree. Sikandar felt nervous. "Let's go back, my soldiers. The voice of the *Pípal* shouldn't be true. We must reach home. No more world-conquest." But Sikandar died on the way. The *Pípal* had told the truth.

The village poet imagines Sikandar's mother lamenting over her son's death. The grave says: "Which Sikandar do you mean, woman ? I have known many Sikandars." Sikandar's death symbolizes to the people that blind power has a fall. And Sikandar is born again and again. Man must succeed one day, the people declare, in the world brotherhood rather than world-conquest that is so hateful. The world brotherhood will mean a real peace for the whole humanity. Everybody will enjoy real freedom, everybody will get good bread.

But I cannot always relish Noora's mystic voice of the past. With the back of his right hand he rubs his chin as he listens to me. I give him a forest song from Central Provinces, aptly translated in Panjábi for him :

> "Among the trees I'm playing on my flute.
> But who careth for this poor forest-dweller ?

No mother have I, nor brother, nor friend in all the world,
All day I'm making music on my flute.

Among the trees I'am playing on my flute.
A mother have I, and brother, and friends to eat with me,
But none of them can help this poor forest-dweller,
So all day long I play upon my flute.

In the shade of a creeper sits a man
The scorpion bites him and he weeps.
Who careth for the dwellers in the forest ?
Among the trees I'm playing on my flute."[1]

Noora likes the scorpion theme. Of the human scorpion, of course, he understands little. The ancient forest dreams haunt him. Like a parrot he would wish to visit the whole forest and would talk to the aged tree on his way :

Tree, O tree !—said the parrot,
Firstly your land is bad,
Secondly your stem is old !

Neither my land is bad,
Nor my stem so old,
Firstly the Nabob's she-camels have eaten me,
Secondly the carpenters cut away the beams.
May the mourners in batches visit carpenters' houses,
May the Nabob's she-camels all expire,
And may the wise, old Nabob himself, too, expire.

I tell him that the old tree speaks the language of an over-exploited peasant, and he gazes like a startled animal. Perhaps realism looks unreal to him. He returns to mysticism again and again :

Stay ye who'll stay here,
I stand ready for the journey,

[1] Verrier Elwin and Shamrao Hivale, *Songs of the Forest*, p. 51.

Separation's cry came in,
In the stirrup I put my foot,
And lo ! I have mounted.

You are proud, O tree,
Lo ! on your head comes
The wood-handled axe !
O, it cut you all to pieces,
Some pieces are picked up and burnt,
Some become rafters in a palace,
Some meet my Lord Ránjhá,
Some stand and yearn and sigh.

Sung in western Panjabi, a wandering minstrel gave this song to Noora, and he is sure of the mystic significance of the voice of Heer, who gave her virgin heart to Ránjhá. The soul is likened to Heer ; God is recognized as the eternal Ránjha.

How I wish that realism should come to Noora. The reflections of the twentieth century, the eddies of the modern agitated life, try to capture his mind, but he will not change so easily. Obviously he knows that the money-lender, who hoards wealth and has pride of superiority over him, has much changed, as have the *Sardárs* and other richer classes ; but he lives in the same old age. His head is filled with God and fate. The leaf of the *pípal* will not move without God's will, he says, though obviously the leaf needs air to move it. He looks foolish and unwise. If a man starves, that's God's will. Another man earns more, God helps him. I really cannot agree with him. Why shouldn't he get the wheat bread enough to face the torment of hunger ? Why shouldn't his sheep and goats look more healthy ? How long will he await God's help ? He is a slave of fate by all standards. When will he get a new shirt that will replace the old one with crude patches everywhere ?

He dreams of the princess Suchitrá. I, too. There is harmony between us. I tell him that Suchitrá sings to me in my dreams: "The flute's singing voice am I, or take me for the rhythm of the peacock-dance. Mother says, you are the colour of saffron. I say, no, no, mother, I'm the shine of the polished gold and my heart is yet a folded flower. The deer thinks I am the doe. I say, no, no, O prince of the forest, I'm my mother's daughter still. The peacock says, come, we'll dance. I say, no, no, O dancer of the forest, father's word do I need still. And then comes the camel-driver and he says, come, ride behind me, and we'll go."

"And who is that camel-driver?" Noora inquires.

"I'm that camel-driver surely," I reply.

"She must ride behind you then with Allah's grace," he says smilingly; "but tell me where will you take her?"

"I'll take her to Russia," I say with gusto; "and Russia is beyond the Kabul frontier—a new heaven on earth."

And I tell him about the Russian shepherds. Even the shepherds should be able to read and write, he wonders. The peasant getting his own newspaper, looks like a white lie to him. Old gods have been driven from Russia, I explain to him, and the new gods are the leaders of the people themselves.

"Do they sing only new songs now?" he asks.

"Many new songs and many old songs too," I tell him; "thousands of old songs have been collected there."

The Song of the Nightingale from ancient Russia, that I give him in his own language, has a familiar flavour for him:

"Far away the nightingale now flieth,
Fare ye well, O friends so dear,
I needs must leave you,

For the time to wing my flight has come now.

Far away the nightingale now flieth,
Far away to distant lands of sunshine,
Thanks I give for all your love,
Thanks for all your tender kindness.

When the little nightingale you harbour'd,
Gave me freedom for my song after nightfall,
Never wrought any evil to my children,
Gladly would I tarry here longer.

But your winter night bitterly chills me,
How I fear your snows white and cruel!
How I fear your winds coldly blowing.

When at last the golden spring returneth,
I shall once more greet you with my singing,
With a new song I shall greet you."[1]

"Only a free nightingale can sing a new song," I tell him; "life without freedom is no life and by freedom I mean first good and sufficient bread."

He appears to feel somehow like a realist as though history was moving. He smiles. Quiet flows the water of the Satluj in the village canal. Happily the sheep and goats graze on the canal-bank; Noora loves everyone of them and has given most poetic names to the pick of the lot.

III

I have three mothers, my own mother and my two aunts who mothered me no less than my mother. The elder aunt wrote "Om" on my tongue with a gold pen and honey used as ink immediately after I was born.

Mother and the elder aunt came from the same

[1] Kurt Schindler, *Songs of The Russian People*, p. 68.

village, both daughters of peasants. The younger aunt too came from a peasant house, and I was born a short time after her marriage; she treated me like a living doll and even felt a sisterly love for me, for she was my elder aunt's niece.

The elder aunt was a childless widow. Grandfather suggested that either she should remarry, or she could be sent to Kanyá Mahá-Vidyálá at Jullundur for education. She was back after five years of schooling, and as she put me in her lap to write "Om" on my tongue, mother told her: "Now he is your child, not mine. I have one before. We are both mothers. One son for me, one son for you." She became my god-mother. And the younger aunt said: "He is my son, too. Little playmate of mine."

My mother knew many folk-songs. But ours was a puritanical house. Even the ancient marriage songs were frowned at. The charming *Giddhá* dance was disallowed.

Folk-songs ran into my blood. Mother knew yards and yards of them, all real peasant songs. And didn't my forefathers sing such songs when they were camel-drivers?

Father, like my newly converted Ārya Samájist grandfather, belonged by inclination to the petty bourgeoisie. I could not mix with the peasant boys. Even at school, my teachers were prejudiced against peasant lore and culture.

Stealthily my *mothers* sang at their spinning-wheels. Sometimes when father was out, a spinning-bee was held at our house and naturally the old spinning melodies echoed in the air. Every time I would pick up some snatches.

I would steal an occasion to find the *Giddhá* dancers somewhere. Be it of boys or girls, n the ring I would

stand marking the various dance forms given by the two or three solo dancers in the centre. With the chorus ended the song, or a couplet served as the song first and then as chorus. The whole ring clapped their hands, aptly feeding the rhythm and the song. Many songs suggested many dance forms; the dancers were exuberant every time. When rains came, the *Giddhá* got intoxicated. It never left the village. It went on somehow every day. The moonlit nights and the starlit skies ever knew it. Every marriage meant a new life for the *Giddhá*, for didn't the virgins ever invite it?

> Enter this village, too, O *Giddhá* dance,
> Pray pass not by the outer path.

In 1925 while I was a student of a neighbouring High School, I started a regular collection of Panjabi folk-songs. Many were the *Giddhá* songs that I welcomed. Guru Nanak had compared real spiritual joy with the *Giddhá*. He must have attended the dance festivals, I thought. Surely, the *Giddhá* songs were songs of free, naked love at times, songs of man and woman inspired by physical exuberance.

Later on at D. A. V. College Lahore, I extended my collection towards Pathan and Kashmiri folk-songs with the help of some students.

It was 1927. I was in my village during the summer vacations. I decided to see Kashmir. Father did not permit me. I had to run away. Without money I travelled like a mendicant. I saw Amarnáth amidst the snowy Himalayan peaks, and visited the villages all over the Valley. Kashmiri music sounded like a dirge. Kashmir's history had not yet washed the stains of blood from its face. Kings came and went away. Every woman gave birth to children only to add to the number of slaves; beauty grew on human trees, yet like

all fruits, it was sold for bread; eyes, dark without *kájal*; cheeks, heated like copper; lips, opening, yet not opening like shy petals; arms, aching to soar across the skies but tired and burdened, all. Every village was a beehive, but the honey had been exploited for centuries.

I had fever at Srinagar. In the bus and train all the way, I felt the tinkling of bells in my head. I had high fever when I reached home. Fever was my saving ground.

Mother's face reminded me of the fragrance of a musk-melon. "Now you won't go," she said. My god-mother said: "You must rest now." And the younger aunt said, "I'll give you enough songs here."

Fever left me after some weeks. Father's anger too had gone. "Time is rare, it must not be lost," he said. But I was obstinate. What is there at college? I thought. There was no sign of guilt or fear on my face, as my younger aunt still remembers. Father had to yield. I left for Baroda to live with my cousin.

Gujaráti girls reminded me of pictures in Ajantá caves. They danced their *Garbá* and sang the ancient folk-songs that made a living poetry. Baroda was like a bridegroom, and it had so many brides.

Soon I was on the move. A third-class railway passenger, travelling without ticket. The ticket-checkers would remove me from the train, and I would catch the next train. Now this way, now that way. I had no definite programme. To-day in Sind, tomorrow in Balochistán or the Bhíl countryside or Maháráshtra. New horizons ever called me. And everywhere I got living song lore of the people.

I would never forget the days that I passed as a coolie at the Tatanagar Workshops. It was a hard life, Very hard. I got intimate glimpses into workers' life; but it was only a short interval in my travels.

At Santiniketan I met the Sántáls. Rabindranath Tagore looked like another Buddha, and every Sántál maiden walked like another Sujátá with all the beauty of art and life. Tagore himself wrote: "Look at the aboriginal Sántál women round our *Asram*. In them the ideal of physical life finds perfect development only because they are ever active in giving it expression in work. Their figures and their movements attain their beautiful harmony because they are always tuned by life's activities. The one thing which I am never tired of admiring is the vigorous cleanliness of their limbs, which never get soiled even by the constant contact with dirt."[1]

Calcutta and Bombay were good. I met thousands of villagers who came from different linguistic zones to earn their bread. I sat with them sharing their food, as I always did in the countryside. Every day, every hour, my collections got richer and richer in variety and value. But I did not seek recognition. I would starve sometimes, passing my night on a footpath.

I visited forests of Central Provinces, and saw the whole of Rájputáná. Sometime I felt homesick, but new people captivated my mind everywhere. Travel was my ambition and I was happy, totally cut off from home.

In 1929, after full two years of wandering, I came back. Mother said: "You felt homesick after all." My god-mother said: "How could you be away so long?" And the younger aunt said: "Were the songs sweeter there?"

Soon I was married. Father thought he could chain me down. But I thought I could run away with the golden chain. "You may go," he said "but not for long. Even the birds return to their nest."

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, *Letters to a Friend*, p. 78.

Jaijaiwanti[1] came from a neighbouring town. But she had danced the *Giddhá* and knew many folk-songs. We settled at Amritsar for some days and then shifted to Lahore. I was a free lance. But I soon got disgusted and returned to my village with my wife.

"Your son has a *Chakkar*, the gypsy spirit, in his feet," once an astrologer had told my mother, though he could not predict that it will be for folk-songs that I would wander about.

Father was not ready to permit Jaijaiwanti to accompany me in my next travel. I started alone. I went to the hills: Dalhousie, Chambá, Dharamsálá, Kángrá, Pálampur, Mandi and Kulu Valley. Then from Kulu to Simla on foot. This time I tried a new method. I would meet educated people. I got a good response. My hosts were kind. And my lectures before small gatherings fetched me some money.

Simla to Darjeeling *via* Santiniketan. Santiniketan was closed, but Darjeeling was tempting as a junction of folk-songs of Nepal and Tibet. The scene of the snows of Kanchanchangá, observed from Tiger Hill at sunrise when the snows bathe in gold, is still etched on my mind. Unlike Calcutta and Bombay, which had many hearts like a spider and which had squeezed so much blood, Darjeeling was sincere.

Soon I reached Assam. It took me a full year there. I saw the Khási hills and other homes of tribal folklore. Assam proper, with its kingly Brahmputrá, now calm, now angry, had its own songs and *Bihu* dances for me. I saw Manipur. Then journeying through North Bengal, I went to Darjeeling once again to meet Rabindranath Tagore. "Folk-songs are dear to me,"

[1] My wife's nick-name being Shánti, she was called Shántisudhá or Snenshánti on previous occasions, but now her new name is dear to her. *Jaijaiwanti* denotes a famous melody in Indian music.

he said smilingly, " you are doing a great work."

I stopped at Calcutta for some days. But letters from Jaijaiwanti made me homesick. And I gave up the idea of leaving for East Bengal.

In December 1931, I returned, spending a month in Bihár and United Provinces on my way. My hundred-year old grandfather was ill. Jaijaiwanti had gone to see her mother. Soon after I brought her home, grandfather expired, and we left for Orissa.

At Puri for the first time in her life Jaijaiwanti saw the sea, "the big, big river", as she called it. Her collaboration was my privilege and now women's songs were within an easy reach. We came down to Cuttack, and later on went to the States. Orissa had poor harvests, but it was rich in songs and dances.

Berhampur Ganjam had more possibilities. The frontiers of Orissa and Andhra embraced here. The adjoining Agency areas, where lived the Khondhs and Sorás—India's aboriginal sons, were homes of malaria, but thanks to quinine, we extended our work in every direction.

We had to leave for Burma now, but Jaijaiwanti could not take a sea-journey. I left her at Berhampur Ganjam and reached Rangoon. Travel in Burma was not without joy. The Irrawady was alive in song and legend. The Burmese language was all strange, but it gave me the delicious milk of folk-poetry.

On August 25, 1932, at Mandalay I received a telegram from Jaijaiwanti and I left immediately bidding adieu to my Gujarati host and many Burmese friends. Jaijaiwanti was in the hospital. She was now the mother of a five-day old daughter. Her name should be Kavitá Vasumati,[1] I suggested. She smiled and said :

[1] *Kavitá* means poetry and *Vasumati* is the earth. Rabindranath Tagore liked this name immensely. I well remember the Poet's

"Kavitá arrived the same day I sent the telegram."

I took to writing work seriously now. Photography had been my hobby for some time but now it helped me in my writing. Lectures and articles gave me just enough. Many journals, especially the "Modern Review", in India, and "Asia", in America, took a special interest in my articles. And I wrote in three Indian languages as well: Panjábi, my mother tongue, Urdu and Hindi.

Blessings and good wishes of Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi added to my zeal and persistence.

Mr. Lionel Fielden, the Comptroller of All-India Radio, showed special interest in my work. Mr. A. S. Bukhári, the present Comptroller, too, is a great admirer of folk-songs. And I have been broadcasting from almost all the stations of All-India Radio.

We have been travelling together with a definite programme all these years, a decade and an year. Jaijaiwanti has been my real strength, though she feels awfully sick of my travel-lust at times and refuses point-blank to move any more. But travel has been her education. And Kavitá Vasumati, who has been brought up in the open air, rightly inherits the gypsy spirit; whenever we move onward, she is happy.

Again and again I return to my village birthplace. Mother says: "Live here more and more." My god-mother says: "Don't you go at all." And my younger aunt says: "Live with us and I'll make songs for you."

How lucky I feel to have three mothers! Last time I photographed them together from many angles. Mother put on the *phulkári* veil she got in her dowry. My younger aunt had her own bridal *phulkári*. But my god-mother preferred her usual white rather than acceding to my

joke when he said smilingly "I am only a poet, but you are father of poetry."

suggestion. They were ready with a hearty laugh as I pressed the shutter of my Rollieflex Automat every time. One of these pictures is a big success. Mother looks like a Russian peasant woman, her rich, luscious laugh lighting the wrinkles cut by the plough of time.

Every night at sleeping time, mother still addresses the earthen lamp while blowing its tiny flame with the fanning of her hand, her words very near to poetry :

> Go, earthen lamp, to your house,
> At her threshold stands your mother waiting for you.
> Come home as the evening comes,
> Go home while the new day dawns.

From time immemorial woman had thus addressed the earthen lamp. I too come back, though after longer intervals, to meet my mother like the earthen lamp.

The folklore here, as at Fontamara, Ignazio Silone's village in Italy, "resembles the ancient art of weaving, the ancient art of putting one thread after another, one colour after another, neatly, tidily, perseveringly, plainly for all to see."

Mother sits at her spinning-wheel, and my mind goes to the interesting bit of folklore of this countryside that inspires every woman to spin more and finer during her 'lambing-time', so that her child gets thick and fine hair. In the mirror, or in a picture, whenever I look at my hair and beard, I always think of my mother devotedly spinning the ancient thread, long and fine.

Father is a changed man now. He does not mind if mother sings folk-songs to me. He is rather amused, as I join with her in the old, old tunes.

" Now you'll stay, won't you ? " mother asks.

" Yes, mother," I say smilingly.

Kavitá Vasumati presses for Kashmir. She was only two years when she was with us in Kashmir in 1934. She saw Ceylon three years back. No Kashmir this year.

Newspaper comes with alarming news. Great mob disturbances in Bombay and other towns. Police busy everywhere. Many firings. Many deaths. Enemy terror on the Assam Frontier. Russia fights on heroically the greatest defensive battle in the history of the world.

War means less travel and more caging. Cost of life has gone three times, five times, seven times......War means little wheat, less milk and no sugar. It may mean starvation and hunger death. The small coin has joined the hidden treasure, a quarter-anna currency note comes to use – the quarter-anna postal stamp !

"Where is Gándhi Bábá ?" mother enquires.

"He has been arrested on the eighth October along with other Congress leaders," I reply.

She looks more worried and I tell her that the leaders will be released soon, and that the whole country must join for the great defensive.

Apart from my books on folk-songs and travel, I write poems, short stories and one-act plays, and now I am writing a full-length drama and two novels. I am becoming a realist more and more ; the war theme comes into my writings.

Enemy war-gods seem to come nearer and nearer. It is time for everybody to stand up, for every Noorá, for every Suchitrá. Even a writer should feel like a soldier. Suddenly I imagine why can't I inspire my people to dig out the gold *mohurs* lying asleep under our fields since the times of Bhadra Sen. But the people's front needs unity more than gold. The enemy war-gods must not be allowed to cut the people's heads as our own forefathers felled the trees with their axes. Must the human forest be cut ? Must the blood flow ? Must the bombs fall on my village, my nest ?

BHADAUR PATIALA STATE
August 15, 1942.

Sisters of the spinning-wheel

"EVER women's company he keeps, yet a thorough saint is he: swift as Wind is he, yet the hero never steps forward: to the entire world he supplies clothes, yet himself ever unclothed he looks: behold his five heads, brother, and his single, good hand[1]—thus the *Charkhá*, or the spinning-wheel, is described in an old Panjábi riddle. Uninterruptedly for well over thousands of years the spinning-wheel has been linked up with human life. "Centuries ago", says Sarojini Naidu, "poets used the simile of the spinning-wheel and the weaver's loom for the destiny of life, the Fates spinning and weaving out man's destiny".[2]

The first spinning-wheel was made by God, says an old proverb of the Panjab. Man is compared to the spinning-wheel. *Shaitán dá charkhá*, or the Devil's spinning-wheel is a common nickname for a cunning fellow.

Panjabi women have always spun. The spinning-wheels inlaid with ivory have been celebrated in their ancient folklore. Their carpenters still know the art of making beautifully carved spinning-wheels. The bride in this land of five rivers still expects to get a *Shísham* wood

[1] *Sadá teemián dá sang kardá jati pher vi poorá,*
Pavan smán chál hai usdi, pair ná chukkdá soorá;
Sáre jagg noon leere deve, ápon rainhdá nangá,
Panj sir usde vekho bhái, hatthá ikko changá.

[2] From a public speech at Madras, *The Hindu*, December 18,1938.

spinning-wheel inlaid with brass wires; the sandal wood spinning-wheel, worthy of a princess, is, of course, beyond the scope of the dowry she receives from her father. A poor man's daughter, obviously, can only get one made of the *Kíkar* wood, or not even that.

In my village the words of the old Panjabi couplet still echo in the hearts of the peasants:

Merá lai chall charkhá othe,
Ve jitthe tere hal vagde.

Carry my spinning-wheel there
O; where your ploughs are tilling.

You are naturally reminded of 'When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?'

As ancient as the cotton-cultivation, the spinning-wheel has a history behind it.

Ever since I can remember, the singing voice of the sisters of the spinning-wheel has been running in my veins like a pulse beating. I look back to the spinning-bees held at our house when I was young.

Spinning with my mother was a thing of art and beauty, as it is even to-day. Jatto, our family midwife, who gave herself airs of holiness with her forehead horizontally wrinkled, joined only occasionally. Dayáwantí, who often wore a dove-coloured veil, was a young thing, slender-waisted and sleepy-eyed; alive with rhythm, her whole body seemed to quiver like a string when she sang. Sávitrí, a cousin of mine, would not sing; she was markedly quiet and Madonna-like. Punjábo looked charming when she smiled; she was an artist out and out, and her songs were much in demand; songs came curling up through her memory. Nihálo, with her round face and her gold tooth, was never seen laughing. Bhágwantí, who had gold beads round her neck, was gifted with a genius for melody; she sang softly. Warm with life-blood and tradition, the spinning-

songs, mostly sung in chorus, seemed to absorb everything.

Again and again I was attracted by the picturesque scene. There was a great bond between the spinning-bee and myself. I listened to the songs for the sheer joy of music. The wheels had been there; and songs, echoing from house to house with all their soulfulness, were impregnated with the rhythm of spinning, at once elemental and ancient. I shall always remember what Dayáwantí once told me: "In my dreams the spinning-wheel talks with me: 'I was made by Visva-Karmá, the divine artist, every heart I approach with creeping footsteps; wherever I go, I give work: I breathe the air of songs: Life is God's gift, I tell the women, and that they should spin as God span life: men do not want me; I am the beloved of women'."[1]

"I draw songs from my heart as I draw yarn", mother would say, "sitting at the wheel I become a new woman. Sometime the spindle goes wrong, but I can soon mend it, and that, too, I do accompanied by some tune that seems to hang on my lips. Long live the spinning-wheel, I say, when it moves rightly."

Pitched in a lower key, Dayáwantí would sing of the sun, the moon, and the stars:

> With every turn of the spinning-wheel,
> I wink at the stars.

Or

> My dreams of the moon I distribute,
> Take them if you care.

[1] Compare Mahatma Gandhi's note, *Swaraj through Women*: 'Since the beginning of time there has been a division of labour between men and women. Adam wove and Eve span. The distinction persists to the present day. Men spinners are an exception . . . experience shows that spinning will remain woman's speciality. I believe there is a good reason behind the experience. Spinning is essentially a slow and comparatively silent process. Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice. . . . Equality of sexes does not mean equality of occupation.'—*Harijan*, December 2, 1939.

Nihálo's favourite song was :

Listen to me, O sun, listen to me, O moon,
Tears roll down my eyes :
The whole world enjoys,
But I spin my sorrows.

A simple couplet often reveals the spirit of the sisters of the spinning wheel. Poignant similes and metaphors run like a crimson thread through the wide range of physical symbols.

The *Trinjan*, as the spinning-bee is called in the Panjab, always makes a happy picture. The young, unmarried girls, the brides, and women of every age, all sit together at their wheels. Room is made for every spinner. They all imbibe the spirit of competition. They all lift their voices together and sing. It seems spinning has never been independent of the song. With its subtle excitement the task of spinning goes on with the spontaneous, unrestrained music of the songs. The young girls make a feast of colours; jet-black, sombre red, yellow, blue, rose-pink and green. Such picturesqueness! Such dark-eyed dreamy types. The young brides, with their *hennaed* fingers, bend their veiled heads over their spindles ; their dresses are silk and brocade, some beautifully embroidered. Mothers forget their worries in this happy company.

Any time may be fixed for the spinning-bee, any house selected for it. Of course each spinner likes to give a party at her place, for she thinks that the spinning-bee, ever under the protection of the gods, adds to the spirit of friendship and peace of mind.

The winter is good for spinning, they say. An all-day spinning-bee, called *Chirí Charoongá*,[1] is easier on a

[1] *Chiri* means sparrow. *Charoongá* is an obscure word for baby-sparrow. The spinning-bee is so called for the spinners are expected to be so busy in their task as to have no time even to see sparrows.

short winter day. After the daybreak, they assemble inside a room and spin till sunset; at noon they get their meal from their homes and they know that it should be soon taken. An oil-lamp is kept burning all the day if the room is dark. Every spinner returns from the spinning-bee with over half a pound of cotton turned into fine yarn. Mothers and brides hurry away as soon as the spinning is over, but most of the young, unmarried girls insist upon going out only after sunset; if the spinning is over before the appointed hour they indulge in some native indoor game.

Another winter spinning-bee is the all-night *Jagrátá.*[1] This begins at about 10 p.m. after the other household work is well over, and it continues till next morning. The night being longer than the day, they can have more output of yarn than what they turn out in the all-day *Chirí Charungá.* Some call it *Rát Kattaní*[2]. Cold is bitter. But spinners have learnt to be enduring. Often fire is kept in an iron pot in the centre. They have woollen blankets. 'What fear has winter for a spinning-bee?' says a Panjabi proverb.[3] They have some home-made sweet or fried corn, maize, gram or wheat, in the small reed-baskets; from time to time they eat, not so much for hunger as for driving away sleep from their eyes. 'Even the spinning-wheel laughs at the napping spinner in the spinning-bee.'[4] Songs continue. The spinning-wheels warble. The dawn wears away. The rays of the morning sun fall on the spinners' faces. All hurry up to finish off the remaining cotton.

Summer is less liked by the sisters of the spinning-wheel. Hot winds make the cotton coarse, they say.

[1] *Jagrátá* means vigil, the Hindustani, *Ratjagá.*
[2] Spinning throughout night.
[3] *Tínjan noon kí dar pále dá?*
[4] *Charkha vi hasse uste, jo tinjan de vich oonghe.*

Water is sprinkled in a basket in which are placed the *Poonián*, or rolls of the carded cotton which become moist and make fine spinning easier. The sittings of the spinning-bee during summer days are held in some airy room, or under the shade of a tree in the compound; and at night they prefer a roof but also like the stars, especially the constellations and the pole star, to watch over them, and the moon, particularly when full, to serve as their lamp. Once I heard the spinners singing:

> Rise, O moon, and give us light,
> Counting the stars, I passed the night.
> Lo! there appears the moon, ye sisters,
> There appears the moon.[1]

Rainy days are pleasant. Cotton gets automatically moist for fine spinning. In every thunder, in every shower of rain, in every downpour, the spinners hear a song. 'If I am a spinner, I can spin even on a broken spinning-wheel'[2] repeats every one of them. But 'as a cook I spoil the corn; and as a spinner I turn cotton into wick-like yarn'[3] is a proverb which when put into the mouth of a good-for-nothing woman, is sure to make the whole spinning-bee burst with laughter.

The placing of the spinners' rolls of carded cotton in a common basket is essential. It is generally done before the commencement of the spinning-bee. One of the women is selected. She first places a set of four or five

[1] *Charh ve channán te kar raushní, táre gindián rát viháee:-*
Auh vekho chann charhiá, ni bhainon, auh vekho chann charhiá.
In love-songs, the moon is often an emblem of the beloved; and the countless stars stand for hours of separation.

[2] *Je main homán káti, tán lakkrán nál vi káti.—Káti* (from *kattná*, to spin) is an obscure word for the 'spinner'; a more frequent word being *Kattanhári* or *Kattanwáli. Lakkrán* (lit. pieces of wood) in this proverb refers to the broken spinning-wheel.

[2] *Annon karán kabannon, kapáhon battian.* Literally it means, 'With corn I make bad food, and cotton I turn into wicks'.

cotton-rolls taken out of her own reed-basket on the palm of her left hand, and as she receives similar sets from everybody she places them crosswise over her own. This group of cotton-roll sets is then placed in the common basket. She gathers a second, a third set and so on in the same order and places them in the basket. She will distribute them as work goes on, so that every girl receives her own set every time. The sets from the common basket are distributed only when the distributor herself has spun her set. No songs are sung while the cotton-rolls are gathered in the basket.

Shy at first, a newly-married bride would soon thaw in the spinning-bee. I remember having seen a bride who tied a piece of yarn to a virgin spinner's wheel and said : '*Je veer piyárá khol de, je khasam piyárá tor de*', *i.e.*, if your brother is dear to you then untie it, if your husband is dear to you then break it. It was a proverbial saying. The girl knew the joke well. To untie the easily breakable yarn piece was a hard game, yet she had to try to show that her brother was dearer to her. But she only succeeded in breaking the thread, and the whole spinning-bee burst with laughter, saying : 'No harm, she loves her husband'.

"Spinning-songs are clever enough, my son", once an old peasant mother told me ; " they remain hidden from me while my hand is away from the handle of the spinning-wheel." It reminded me of the words of a Kashmiri boatman who said : "The tunes of my boat-songs will certainly fall flat if I sing without actually playing my heart-shaped paddle."

Work songs, all over the world, show an obvious, psychological connection between tunes and the tasks of manual labour ; they are hardly to be severed from the efforts and movements they were invented to fit. I noticed in various parts of India how difficult it was to

collect the songs of toil from villagers while they were away from their work. Some of them would sing voluntarily, but they would often fail to produce the genuine music of their songs of toil. Back at their task, their songs would rush out correctly.

In districts scores of miles apart, variants of the same songs may be heard. Old songs live in the memory. But the spinners continue to make attempts at new songs.

Words of new songs sometime appear to fit a tune badly. The singers soon smooth out the crudity. Women who would make new songs always have the richest treasury of old songs at their finger-tips. They worship the genius of the old singers.

All the songs are not about the wheel. No doubt the spinners here and there return to the music of the wheel itself. Here is a beautiful song, sung to a significantly melodious tune:

> "*Ghoon, ghoon*, O my spinning-wheel!
> Should I spin the red roll of carded cotton or not?"
> "Spin, girl, spin."
>
> "Far-off is my father-in-law's place,
> Should I live there or not?"
> "Live, girl, live."
>
> "Long, long is my woe,
> Should I tell it or not?"
> "Tell, girl, tell."
>
> "My husband is a minor,
> Should I stay with him or not?"
> "Stay, girl, stay."
>
> "*Ghoon, ghoon*, O my spinning-wheel,
> Should I spin the red roll of carded cotton or not?"
> "Spin, girl, spin."

The sad girl talks to her spinning-wheel. Perhaps none else is ready to share the deep sorrow with her. She

is not a rebel, not at all. She must wait till her minor husband is a youth. The spinning-wheel symbolizes the guardian angel. She puts her own voice in the mouth of the spinning-wheel. She bears with everything as she learns to spin even the rough cotton into fine thread. Her woe mingles with her duty.

Another song is addressed to the bridal veil, though, unlike the spinning-wheel, it keeps silent. It is red, it will always be red, the *sáloo* as it is called by brides and all men and women. The mother and the mother-in-law are things apart, as the following song portrays:

> I spin, I spin a fine, fine thread, O my bridal veil,
> My mother-in-law, my mother-in-law sent me a bridal basket,
> O my bridal veil,
> I opened it, I opened it on a dark night, O my bridal veil,
> From inside came out, from inside came out a black serpent,
> O my bridal veil,
> I threw it, I threw it across the river, O my bridal veil.
>
> I spin, I spin a long, long thread, O my bridal veil,
> My mother, my mother sent me a bridal basket, O my bridal
> veil,
> I opened it, I opened it on a moonlit night, O my bridal veil,
> From inside came out the *Naulakhá* necklace, O my bridal veil,
> I put it on, I put it on endearingly, O my bridal veil.

Words are inseparable from music. They seem to fly on the wings of the melody.

The wheel may be of gold and silver, as the ancient folk-songs witness:

> O my mother, *ghoon, ghoon,* the spinning-wheel warbles!
> Mine is a spinning-wheel made of gold,
> Its axle made of silver I procured.
>
> O my mother, *ghoon, ghoon,* the spinning-wheel warbles!
> The thread that rotates the spindle is of silk,
> Beautifully I got it dyed.
> O my mother, *ghoon, ghoon*, the spinning-wheel warbles!

In some songs the spinners dream of the sandal wood wheels. One of my pretty sisters-in-law, who passed away four years ago, gave me a gem of a folk-song :

My spinning-wheel is of *Kíkar* wood, darling
Get me one of sandal, darling.

Cotton I won't spin any more,
Wcol I won't spin any more,
Get me silk for spinning, darling.

My spinning-wheel is of *Kikar* wood, darling,
Get me one of sandal, darling.

The spinners seem to think little and dream much. "When goddesses lived on the earth they always preferred spinning-wheels made of sweet-smelling sandal wood ; Saraswati always span silk, while others took to cotton ; and daily they held their spinning bees"—an old Bráhmin woman once told me, and she meant it.

The spinning-songs, in which every-day-life is viewed through the veil imposed by the singers, evoke the poetry of life, ever projecting beautiful pictures.

Some of the couplets, each of them mostly complete in itself, are highly symbolical. Some are purely impressionistic. The windy freshness of their rhythmic tunes belongs to the realm of the *Giddhá* dance. Frequent references to spinning in some of them seem to show their origin in the spinning-bees. In the *Giddhá*, the couplets are prologued, as Nihalo's song, addressed to the sun and the moon, shows. The prologue has actually no limit, it may run into many lines. But the spinners often rarely take to the prologued pieces. They like to sing the simple couplets, and as regards music, it is not actually the same as is found in the *Giddhá* dance ; freedom is taken in order to adapt them to the rhythm of spinning.

Here are three prologued pieces. They are sung by brides and girls :

My mother gave me a spinning-wheel,
Inlaid with gold nails.
O mother, I think of you,
Whenever I see my spinning-wheel.

My spinning-wheel is made of *kikar*,
Get me one of the *shisham* wood
How heavily it moves,
Thirty-six times has broken the thread that rotates the wheel
All the girls have come after the spinning,
I cannot spin any longer,
My spinning-wheel is a nasty creature,
O it won't let the innocent girl go to sleep.

O at home, my daughter, you never feel happy,
Outside you ever go to spin :
On the left hip you carry the spinning-wheel ;
The unusual thread you spin.
O you look so awfully cross,
Whenever your husband comes to fetch you.

The whole range of simple couplets emerges from a living poetry :

My love is a sugar candy—
Sweetly he talks to me.

My love is a sandal tree—
I am satisfied with the scent.

My love is a cypress plant—
I begged and got from God.

Alas, I shall have to leave the full spinng-bee,
Here comes the strong man's bullock-cart.

My friendships of the spinning-bee—
O I remembered them in my bridal bullock-cart.

Let's go to give farewell to our friend,
Spinning we do almost everyday.

Leave the spinning-wheel, remove your seat,
Your parents all right will give you dowry.

O camel-drivers, the camels have gone to Lahore,
Lonely I feel while spinning, pray ask my husband to come home.

Your drunkard son, O widow,
O he broke the axle of my spinning-wheel.

All the night you searched and searched
I hid myself in the spinning-bee.

Overhearing the echo of the spinning-wheel,
The ascetic came down from the mountain.

They do not necessarily rhyme together, nor are both always lines of a couplet of the same length. The prologue of a *Giddhá* couplet, however, is beautifully rhymed. The first line of each couplet in the prologue is free as in the chief couplet ; the second line of each of the group keeps up the rhyme, balancing the one in the second line of the chief couplet.

A couplet of this type, prologued or simple, is called *Bolí*.[1] From the depths of the heart comes the music that keeps up the words of a *Bolí* fresh and thrilling ; its lilt glorifies the isolated themes.

The *Bolí* is noted for extempore variations. The gifted spinner, it would seem, adds a new piece every now and then to the floating reserve. Every new composer would try to put the best emotion and lyrical impulse. The whole spinning-bee shares the joy of a new couplet and soon it echoes through the whole neighbourhood. The free arrangement of the lines allows ample scope to

[1] *Bolí* means 'speech' literally, the plural is *Bolián*.

alter a few words and to put in a new idea. Passing from mouth to mouth, as observations show, the new couplets acquire their traditional character like old folk-songs.

Some are worthless as poetry. But some are remarkable both for their meaning and for feeling. Turning from subject to subject, the *Bolí*-makers sometimes catch hold of a charming picture. It is only when they explore deep emotions that the poetic genius gleams 'like the flashing of a shield'.

Before a score of couplets have been sung, a spinner has many more in her head. So says the bidding *Bolí*-champion with deliberate modesty:

Bolián dá pul bannh dián,
Methon jagg jittiá ná jáve.

With *Bolí* songs I may build a bridge;
But I cannot outshine the whole world.

Outwardly she strikes a note of humility. But she is a mine of songs. Her aspiration is to know many more, so as to outnumber the bricks used in building a bridge.

Kattní is a small reed-basket for the carded cotton rolls and balls of yarn. The spinner makes it herself giving it an ornate lid. As fancy inspires her she believes that little *Kattní* is acquainted with poems and the spinning-wheel has learnt the singing of couplets:

My *Kattní* recites poems,
My spinning-wheel sings the couplets.

Hearken, ye stars!
My spinning-wheel sings the couplets.

My *Kattní* recites poems,
The moon looks it stealthily.

A girl begs that the youth should kill a peacock to supply her with quills to make a beautiful *Kattni*, but he refuses to oblige her :

Go and kill a peacock for me, my love,
A new *Kattni* I wish to make.

I won't sinfully kill the peacock ;
Of reeds you must make your *Kattni*.

This youth may still show his love ; he does so in his own way while she sits in the spinning-bee. It makes her inquire with a blush :

Which clever youth threw the pebble ?
It came right inside my *Kattni*.

The spinner sings freely. Like the girls and brides everywhere, they sing of love again and again :

In my dream, I embraced him ;
I opend my eyes and saw him not.

The sand of your fresh foot print,
Again and again I pick up and put to my heart.

The moon rises daily
Without my love it is all dark.

A dust-cloud fills my sight :
My love's figure I see no more.

Twenty letters came from you :
The one about your coming you never wrote.

Pollen is formed on the berry trees :
Not yet came the lord of my heart.

Love-couplets are simple and outrageously frank. They often run into a series making a significant scroll. Love-match is rare. A girl always marries a boy after her parents' will, and she is expected to make a good wife. Wedded love provides no inspiration for love-poetry. The twilight of romance is a necessity. The "drinker of fresh milk", the sweetheart of the goatherds, comes again and again :

> O drinker of fresh milk,
> Layers of cream are seen now on your bosom.

Or :

> You'll bear a son like a lump of curd,
> O drinker of fresh milk.

The bride at honeymoon is a regular theme ; it is sung everywhere :

> With the edge of her veil she fanned out the earthen lamp,
> With the twinkle of her eye she talked to me.

Another heroine is Banto that now figures as a type of beauty. Her head is likened to a jungle, her face symbolizes the moon, and her waist reminds us of a leopardess.

The love-sick girl cannot spin. She invokes gods for blessings ; she is so sure of their nearness. But they do not seem to help her.

The couplets have a large family. Like the spinners themselves, they exchange side-glances. Some are antiphonal. They even lead to criticism of life, bearing a progressive satire on contemporary society.

The longer songs give full pictures. They are more popular with the elderly women who take pride in their long-winded music. Redolent of the ancient spirit of the spinning bee, they are essential :

BROTHERS SHED TEARS

The dark *shisham*, mother, the dark *shísham*,
Of the dark shísham I got the spinning-wheel made.
For it my merchant father liberally paid,—
Who got it ready, mother, O who got it made ?
I took it from the shop and placed in the yard
People thought the yard is filled with light.
I took it from there and placed inside
People thought the lamp was burning bright.
I took it from there and placed on the roof
People thought the crescent moon had risen.
I took it from there and placed in the street
Wazir Khán was dazzled as he passed by.
Don't you fear, Wazir Khan, don't you fear, brother,
This spinning-wheel has spun your turban.
The two supports of the wheel are of the *kau* wood made,
Having bid audieu to sisters, brothers shed tears.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

Mother, cook the *chuláee* leaves,
Pray rend them first in tiny pieces.
Mother, make it delicious with a *seer* of butter,
Whenever your daughter comes from the spinning-bee.

Daughter, bring your spinning-wheel here,
Mother and daughter will spin together.
Mother, you are old and I am young,
We cannot pull on together.

Daughter, your kingly father will hear,
O where did you pick up this falling out ?
Mother, sisters of the spinning-wheel all fall out,
I, too, picked it in their company.

Mother, you yourself bring my spinning-wheel ,
Sisters of the spinning-wheel will not give my seat.
Mother, you yourself bring my seat,
Sisters of the spinning-wheel will not give my basket.

Mother, you yourself bring my basket,
Sisters of the spinning-wheel will not leave me.

THE DARK CLOUD

From the east came the dark cloud,
From the west came the cruel rains.
Who'll help my rolls of carded cotton ?
Who'll help my spinning-wheel ?

My brother's wife will help my rolls of carded cotton,
My brother will help my spinning-wheel,
Her plaited tresses got wet,
His cheque wrapper got wet.

Where will her plaited tresses dry up ?
Where will his cheque wrapper dry up ?
Her plaited tresses will dry in the palace
His cheque wrapper will dry up in the garden.

SONG OF THE BRIDE

The first time the family-messenger came to take me,
What the hell do I care, with him I will not go :
I can't lift my veil,
I can't trail my scarf,
I can't tread my path,
O family-messenger, yes, O family-messenger !
The family messenger is a perfect fool,
He picks up a quarrel,
I cry for justice,—
I will not go, I will not go, I will not go.

The second time my husband's younger brother came to take me.
What the hell do I care, with him I will not go :
I can't lift my veil,
I can't trail my scarf,
I can't tread my path,
Husband's younger brother, yes, O husband's younger brother !
He is my heart's darling,
A minor, yet a thorough passionate fellow,—
I will not go, I will not go, I will not go.

The third time my husband's elder brother came to take me,
What the hell do I care, with him I will not go :
I can't lift my veil,

I can't trail my scarf.
I can't tread my path,
My husband's elder brother, yes, O my husband's elder brother!
Under the bed he goes—
The preserver of my veil,—
I will not go, I will not go, I will not go.

The fourth time my father-in-law came to take me,
What the hell do I care, with him I will not go :
I can't lift my veil,
I can't trail my scarf,
I can't tread my path,
My father-in-law, yes, O my father-in-law !
He is a peevish fellow,
An old man, yet all the more jealous,—
I will not go, I will not go, I will not go.

The fifth time my husband himself came to take me,
O dance with him, my mind, the peacock dance,
I could lift my veil,
I could trail my scarf,
I could tread my path,
My husband, yes, O my husband !
My heart's master is he,—
I go, I go, I go.

THE SONG OF LACHHI

Ahá, where Lachhí washes her face,
There a sandal grows—where Lachhí washes her face.

Ahá, Lachhí asks the girls,
What coloured veil suits a fair complexion—Lachhí asks the girls.

Ahá, truly said the girls,
A veil that's black suits a fair complexion—truly said the girls.

The *Song of the Bride*, originally a dance-song, is adapted to the rhythm of the spinning-wheel. The *Song of Lachhi* is again a dance-song, toned down in the spinning-bee; the original three couplets do not hide themselves even in the rearranged pattern.

"The veil is a woman's life history. It is her mischief as a young girl. The red veil of the bride contains all her tenderness, her shyness and her passion. The veil of the matron is at once one with her dignity and her self-respect. The white veil of the widow is her shroud and her barrier from the bitter world. Her nature, her character are written upon it more surely than upon the lines of her hand. Without it she would be no longer herself, but a bare tree shorn of the glory of leaves." [1]

Through their songs the sisters of the spinning-wheel express their joy and sorrow, hope and despair, anger and fear. The old songs seem to pulsate with new blood in every generation.

That the spinning-bee has lost its old hold on the countrywomen is a sad commentary on an age of turmoil we are passing through. Must the machine take away the spinning-wheel ? The young bride remembers her mother, but surely she does not remember by heart the whole stock of her mother's songs—songs that her mother inherited from her own great-grandmother.

Years ago, in a letter addressed to Anand K. Coomaraswamy, a lover of folk-songs discussed the loss of craft-songs in England : "What is to me most tragic, however, is the thought, nay, the conviction that for every old song found, there must be two or three lost utterly and irrevocably. We notice this particularly in the songs of the crafts. There are many records of songs of crafts having been in existence, but the songs themselves are no more to be found. It is machinery and industrialism that has destroyed them and we notice that wherever machinery and industrialism has come more recently, there do more of the old songs still survive. That is why in agriculture we have the largest collection of existing

[1] Freda Bedi, *In Praise of the "Dopattá"*, The *Tribune*, Lahore June 7, 1943.

songs. In smithing, where there is still very little machinery—the blacksmith, farrier, village smith, a good many still linger, but the songs of the weavers and the spinners are gone with the handloom, as the songs of the potters have gone with the hand-wheel, and all those others where a man could sing peacefully in the job of his work. What would you have ? You simply cannot sing when you have belts of machinery whirling aloud over your head and 5,000 other people working with you...I am convinced that it is only in old societies that have been untouched by industrialism, that the real connecting link is still to be found between music and handicraft, just as it is between handicraft and other things of a communal purpose."[1]

The spinning-bee is now breaking up in the Panjab villages. Old spinning-songs are fast disappearing.

Will it not be a rich compensation to preserve on phonographic records the songs of the sisters of the spinning-wheel ?

The spinning metaphor is eternal. The poet of the Vedas asked his gods "to spin out the ancient thread". He sang again and agan : "As fathers they have set their heritage on earth, as a thread continuously spun out."[2] Rich in detail, the picture of the young husband wearing on the first day of the marriage the garment made by the bride, as seen in the Atharva Veda, looks very significant. Is not the ancient tradition still alive in India everywhere in one form or other ? During the first year of her stay at her father-in-law's, the bride in Orissa, especially in Sambalpur district, would do no other work than spinning. Assam is equally proud of the spinning-wheel and the hand-loom. And in the Panjab, it

[1] *The Ceylon National Review*, July 1906, pp 19-23.
[2] Rig Veda, X, 56-6.

was only natural that Hussain, the Sufi poet (1539—1593 A.D.) should compare his soul to a gril, who remained unmarried because she failed to prepare for her trousseau the yarn which, after the ancient tradition, she had to spin herself. As the husband adored the young wife who brought dowry, hand-spun and country-made, so God liked the Sufi who died with a good account of Karma.

Freely I go to the countryside and come back every time with scores of old and new songs. Freely I ask the spinners to raise their voice in a rich chorus. Freely I tell them of the "glorious tomorrow" when life will be worth living, and new songs will outnumber the new balls of yarn.

"You want songs," said a blushing young maiden, as I approached a spinning-bee in a remote village, "why not join us in our bee? You will have plenty and to spare by the evening."

So insatiable is my thirst for folk-songs that I decided to make a fool of myself and sat down in the circle of bright, gay girls.

The maiden, who had invited me, sang, burying her head in her knees :

> If you'll marry, you old man,
> First get your beard shaved
> Listen, I speak the truth.
> O you must bring a gold palanquin.

I saw through the joke. They all blushed. I did not regret the happy occasion, however, and rose from my seat much uplifted. Then an old peasant grandmother appeared on the scene. She asked me sharply : "But why don't you enquire about the growth of the cotton ?"

I stood there silently. "We got very little cotton this year," she went on saying, "and this year spinning-bees

will be thin. Even the cotton plants fall sick like men and women and children, my son, and we can't give them medicine." This was her realism. Her songs were over.

The sisters of the spinning-wheel joined the grandmother to laugh at me. "First tell us some way to save the old spinning-wheels from white ants," the maiden, who blushed no more, was saying, "and then enquire about our songs."

3

Blood and sand

HUXLEY wrote during his flying visit to India : "The desert of Rajputana is a kind of Sahara, but smaller and without oases. Travelling across it, one looks out over plains of brown dust. Once in every ten or twenty yards, some grey-green plant, deep-rooted, and too thorny for even camels to eat, tenaciously and with a kind of desperate vegetable ferocity struggles for life. And at longer intervals, draining the moisture of a rood of land, there rise here and there, the little stunted trees of the desert. From close at hand the sparseness of their distantly scattered growth is manifest. But seen in depth of the long perspective of receding distance, they seem—like the in fact remotely scattered stars of the Milky Way—numerous and densely packed. Close at hand the desert is only rarely flecked by shade ; but the farther distances seem fledged with a dense dark growth of trees. The foreground is always desert, but on every horizon there is the semblance of shadowy forests. The train rolls on, and the forests remain for ever on the horizon ; around one is always and only the desert."[1]

Looking back through the mist of centuries can't we discern that once the waters of the great Indian ocean flowed over much of the desert areas in Rajputana ?

[1] Aldous Huxley, *Rotunda*, p. 997.

"Indeed, in many parts of Jaisalmer there still remains the illusion of a tide recently gone out but forgotten to return, leaving great stretches of thirsty, flat rock gasping in the sunlight. And, where once the ocean's waters ebbed and flowed, now the desert tide advances, slowly and remorselessly."[1]

The Sheikháwáti district of Jaipur is notorious in folklore: "Oh, curse this Sheikháwáti land: my bread is half wheatmeal and half sand." In fact the whole desert is cursed: "Once the Aravalli hills crossed, hope of home is forever lost." The Famine's reply to his mother is most significant; "*Pag Poogal dhar kotre, báhoo báyarmer; phirto ghirto veekpur, thávo Jaisalmer*," *i.e.*, "My feet are in Pungal, my body in Kotra, my arms in Barmer. In forgetful moments I'll visit Bikaner. But I'm always in Jaisalmer." No girl of the fertile parts of Rajputana would like to be married in the desert, where the wells are deep and the poisonous snakes are common.

But Rajputana is not merely a land of sand and famine. It is a land of war-songs and stories of warrior blood.

The fourteen million people of Rajputana[2] find no

[1] A. W. T. Webb, *These Ten Years*: A Short Account of 1941 Census Operations in Rajputana and Ajmer-Merwara, p. 6.

[2] Larger than United States of America, Norway or Italy. In India, Rajputana is larger than the United Provinces or Bengal, and only a little less than Madras, Baluchistan or the Punjab. The Aravalli Hills run north-east and south-west and divide Rajputana into two unequal portions. No less than three fifths is the *Márudesh*, or the desert, that includes Sirohi, Márwár, Bikáner, Jaisalmer and the Sheikhawati *nizámat* of Jaipur. And the green Rajputana embraces Mewár, Tonk, Kishangarh, Jaipur, Karauli, Alwar, Baharatpur, Dholpur, Ajmer-Márwárá—the British district, Dántá, Pálanpur, Dungarpur, Bánswárá, Pártabgarh, Bundí, Kotá and Jháláwár.

substitutes for blood and sand. War-songs echo and re-echo. Stories of martyrs are told and retold. Every hill and every hill-pass, crowned by a fort, every town beautifully walled, the countless domed memorials of warriors and kings, who preferred death to defeat, the impressive *Satí* Stones even in the miles of sand—all seem to say : "What is past is not dead."

THE BARDS

The origin of the Bards, or the *Chárans*, as the Rajputs called them, is a complicated problem of history. It seems probable that the tenth century A.D. found them scattered in various parts of North India, and that round about Kanauj, their favourite centre, they had rich colonies.

The time of Hinglaj, the premier goddess of the bards, is approximately the ninth century A. D. They have many goddesses, and when they say, *Nou Lakh Lovadiál*, *i.e.*, "Nine lacs of goddesses every one wearing a *Lovadí*, or a *woollen Sári*", they really mean it. And all the goddesses are said to be half or full incarnations of Mother Hingláj.

Rajputana became a *Tírath Kshetra*, or holy place, to all the bards, and many members of their community living in far-off places came as pilgrims to the seat of Ubbatdevi, whose temple stands on the hill of Tenda, fourteen miles from Jaisalmer. And many of the pilgrims settled down in Raputana at different times.

Then came the fourteenth century. On its heels came bloody warfare. Ranthambor Fort had already passed into the hands of Alauddin. Chittor Fort, too, went. Padmini, the lotus-eyed queen burned herself alive, along with many other Rajput women. It was *Jauhar*, their last resort. They valued their honour and for it they

sacrificed themselves; and thereby they inspired their men to wear yellow clothes and face the enemy heroically, rather desperately. The bard saw all this before his eyes. In his heart of hearts, Mother Hingláj spoke to him: "Why are you silent, my son? Why not sing of warrior blood?" Every night he saw Mother Hingláj in his dreams and every night she repeated the same words.

The bardic poetry leaped to a high pitch. The songs were sung to the great *Máru Rág*. Songs of hard realities of life. Songs which the bard loved, which everybody loved.

Soon there appeared Rana Hammir Singh on the scene, and he resumed possession of Chittor Fort. The Rajputs rejoiced. The bard stood and watched the scene with the eyes of an artist. Mother Hingláj patted him on his back. He had sung successfully.

The war for honour and freedom went on for centuries. It was not always a victory for the Rajputs. Sometimes they were badly defeated. They suffered much. The Ráj family of Mewár always yearned for a united front. But it was not possible. Some of the Rajput chiefs had given way. The Mewár Ráj, however, did not lose ground for hundreds of years.

Every war-song spoke of generations of swordsmen, who gave everything for freedom. The bards sang with gusto. The warriors heard the call of honour.

The Chárans as a race were not all bards. Many of them were cattle-breeders. They raised their huts in the forests, every little colony called *Nes*. The Cháran, even as a herdsman, helped the cause of war. He raised cows and horses of fine breeds. His one consolation was that he supplied milk and *ghee* to the heroes, and that he produced mettlesome horses and mares.

Sometimes the Charan took to the work of a *Banjárá*, or travelling tradesman; and with his loaded bullock, he went from village to village. He kept daggers, swords and shields, too, for sale and had many opportunities to contribute weapons to the poor, honorary soldiers.

Every now and then the cattle-breeder Cháran produced a son who could make new songs. Poetry was in his blood. The whole neighbourhood rejoiced when a new poet appeared on the scene.

The bard's person was sacred. He was never awarded capital punishment, whatever his crime. The nation wanted him for war-songs. His genius impressed the kings, who always patronized him, and he was always at liberty to say anything he liked in the open durbar. The bard's first impluse was to acknowledge the gifts the king bestowed on him, but he never suffered from inferiority complex. The royal patronage came to him as the dew comes to the flower. As every Rajput mother's son was expected to be a swordsman, ever ready to fight for the freedom of his country heroically, so was the bard expected to spread the gospel of honour and freedom through the length and breadth of Rajputana.

When it was a war to the knife, the bard, too, took hold of sword and shield to do his bit. It is a pity that Rajput history to-day does not give a full list of bards who rose to distinction as martyrs.

War-poetry was never the monopoly of the bard. The Rajput sirdars and kings, too, contributed to it. Anyone who felt inspired sang extempore. The women sang more and with a greater force. The bard put many of his songs into woman's mouth. The woman, in her turn, composed her own songs.

The bard's wife had a separate rôle. She helped the

womenfolk in their song contests. None actually claimed authorship. They shared each other's songs, as they shared each other's smiles and tears. Every Rajput woman, as she roused her husband to go to the battlefield, wove a new couplet.

The new recruits in the creation of heroic poetry looked to the bard for revision and improvement of their songs.

The songs were never recorded. There are no references to the bard keeping a written collection with him. His memory was great. He followed in the oral tradition.

The text of a song was not fixed. Nor did it attain at once its final form. New songs came into being with every new battle. Their authorship passed into oblivion ; the sex of the original author, too, was not known. The song, in which woman spoke, did not always indicate its origin from woman. It was a fashion with the bard to put songs into the mouth of woman. In some cases, a couplet had one line from one sex and the second from the other.

The bard accompanied the soldiers to the battlefield with a flag of his own. While singing, he became a new man. Poetry flowed from his lips like a stream. All the bards might have been cast from the same mould : so similar were their traditions and heroic ideals. Everything they had, their bodies, their hearts, their souls, belonged to Rajputana ; they wanted it to remain free, always free.

SONGS OF HONOUR AND FREEDOM

Tod says : "There is not a petty state in Rajasthan that has not had its Thermopylae and scarcely a city that has

not producad its Leonidas."[1] Every battle for independence was faught with sword and shield as also with songs of honour and freedom. The war-song struck its roots deeply into the soul of the Rajput. It was the voice of blood and sand.

"A virgin mine of history and of language," this is how Grierson paid a tribute to the bardic poetry of Rajputana.[2] And Rabindranath Tagore went on to say : "The literature that Rajputana created out of her blood is unique and it is not without reason. The Rajput bards sang extempore to the war-drum, facing the hard reality of life. It was the dance of nature, like Siva's *Tandava* that they saw before them. Can anyone today create that type of poetry through imagination? The heroic sentiment and emotion, enshrined in every couplet of Ŕájasthání, is the original asset of Rajputana and pride of India at large. It is spontaneous, sincere and nearer to nature . . . . the bards sang and roused the heroes and today I have listened to the age-old songs of the bards. They have a force even today."[3]

The Rajput war-song mostly took to *Doohá*[4] or *Dohá*—the couplet, that the poets and the people had so far used only to sing of love between man and woman or to express some religious and philosophical thought. Longer

[1] *Annals of Rajasthan.*

[2] *Linguistic Survey of India.*

[3] Rabindranath Tagore, Extract from a speech before the Rajputana Research Society, Calcutta, delivered on Feb. 18, 1937.

[4] The *Doohá* in Rajputana is found in four forms—the *Doohá*, the *Sorthá* or *Sorthio Doohá*, the *Baro Doohá* and the *Tumveri Doohá*. The second form is praised in an old *Doohá* : "*Sorthio dooho bhalo, bhali Marvan ri vát ; joban chháee dhan bhali, tárán chháee rát*," i. e., "The *Sathio Doohá* is good, romance of Marvan is good, the young woman is good, and good, too, the starlit night."

metres like the *Sávjhor*, *Sánor*, *Supankhro* and the *Kavitta*, too, were tried.

Every line of a *Doohá* is divided into two lines to suit the rhythm in the translation. My attempt has been to remain as close to the texts as possible. It was in 1928 that I came in touch with some of the bards of Rajputana. Later on after a gap of nine years, in 1937, I visited the land of the songs of blood and sand and collected more songs. I have had many friends, who gave me texts of war-songs and again saved me from mistakes by explaining the obscure words.

The songs still stir the people's blood. The bard has a long memory. And he sings to a high pitch, 'suggestive of the howling winds on desert sand-dunes.'

One widely diffused theme is that a true Rajput is one who is never afraid of war and that such a person alone can a daughter of Rajputana accept as the lord of her heart :

> The shell awaits the fall of the heavenly dew
> The *chakvi* bird awaits the rising sun
> The Rajput awaits the renewal of the battle
> And the damsel awaits the man who is brave.

It is popularly believed that the drops of dew from heaven deposited in shells form themselves into pearls, and that the heart of a brave person is a shell in which heroism is formed like a pearl. Again it is supposed that just as the *chakvi* is attracted to the rising sun, so the beautiful maiden of Rajputana is drawn to a hero.

[1] I am deeply indebted to Raghunath Prasad Singhania and Bhagwati Prasad Bisen—the founders of the Rajasthan Research Society, Calcutta, who put at my disposal their valuable collection.

Every woman is expected to give birth to a brave son, or at least to one who is liberal ; otherwise she might better have no son at all :

Bring forth a hero, O Mother,
Or one who is generous
If not, better have no child at all
Why lose your grace in vain ?

The mother should sing a heroic cradle-song ; this is the time-old theme. Every woman loves to hear this song :

'Leave not your land in foreign hands
Fight like a hero on the battle-field.'
Thus sings the mother as she rocks her child
Enjoining him to live and die with honour.

One hero will do, many cowards are no good ; this is the psychology of the women of warrior blood :

Gandhari gave birth to one hundred sons
But Kunti had only five
Kunti's sons defeated Gandhari's sons
What good then to have many sons ?

The woman's voice goes straight. She urges her husband to smash the enemy :

When you reach the battle-field, my husband,
What will you hold superior ?
Your companions are three—
A stout heart, a sharp sword, and a strong hand.

The war-drum speaks the language of action :

May I be true to my husband.
Go on, go on, O Drum !

May I save my honour in the village-assembly,
May my words be true amidst my female friends.

The suggestion is that if the drum-play goes on, her husband will fight bravely, and she will be honoured everywhere.

The wounded warrior lies on the sick-bed. Suddenly a minstrel comes and starts singing. The warrior's wife keeps the whole situation in her control :

His body is wounded with swords,
Everywhere stitch after stitch is seen ;
O with his green wounds he'll run away,
Only for a moment stop, O Minstrel !

Must the warrior feed his horse on *ghee* ? The thrifty wife argues :

"Don't you quarrel with me, my beautiful wife,
When I offer *ghee* to my horse :
Whenever comes the time to attack
He will be my strength."

"They feed upon the air and the plants
Faster than your horse they go :
O let me ask you, my lord,
Whose *ghee* do the deer take ?"

The lion, somehow, symbolizes the Rajput hero, though, unlike the lion, the Rajput is doubly sure of his motherland :

Home and abroad the same to the lions,
What motherland for the lions ?
Any forest the lion enters,
That's exactly his motherland.

Echoes of resistance come from every house. No

demoralization. No life without freedom. The woman prompts the hero. The mother and the wife speak almost with one voice in scores of Rajput sengs :

The war-drum goes on in the army
The heroes are roaring ;
Honour says : 'Now die, O man !'
Cowardice says : 'Now let's go home !'

The mellow drum of my husband
Now goes on full of courage ;
The enemies' mind gets startled,
The friends' mind jumps with joy.

My lord, now go to the battlefield,
O don't you prove a coward ;
Shame for you, reproach for me—
O none will call it a thing of honour.

O hero, now go to the battle-field,
Wield without fear your iron weapon ;
Widowhood will not cling to me,
And you won't have to share disgrace.

Don't you come back running, my lord,
If you run, disgrace to me ;
All my female friends
Will clap their hands and turn their faces.

The opium jumps up from the cups,
The saffron jumps up from the howdahs :
My lord, as you go to that house[1],
Your head you should not take with you.

Very good if he dies in the battle
Still good if he returns safely
Both ways, O my female friends
The elephants will pass before my door.

[1]The battle-field.

If the enemy's warriors have fled away,
It must be due to my husband, my female friend,
If our warriors are coming back,
He must have become a martyr.

Of my husband, my female friend,
I got this assurance—
Defeated, he will not return,
He must win the battle, if he comes at all.

Of my husband, my female friend,
I got this assurance—
Either he goes to the heaven
Or he wins the battle if he comes at all.

My female friend, my husband's sword,
Strikes the bosom all right,
As long as the enemy's army stands, he will not fall,
First victory over the enemy's army, then he may fall.

Get up, O Ráhab, the archer,
Twirle your moustaches, don't you weep ;
Heroes die once in a way,
Weeping ill becomes the heroes.

On one hand is life,
On the other hand stands honour ;
Life says : 'Let's go to Joginpur.'
Honour says : 'Attack, O kingly hero !'

O man without self-reliance,
O coward, why do you run back ?
O you'll die even within the iron-walled house,
Or you may be safe in the open field.

Your horse neighs at the door,
The heroes wait upon you in the front-room of the house,
Wear the bracelet, go to the war,
Lo ! the war-drum is going on.

If such is the kingly hero's advice
O I must accompany you
Then the enemy, too, will mark
The hand to hand fight of mine.

Wifehood tastes all brackish,
When the husband is a coward ;
Widowhood looks graceful,
If her husband is a hero.

You said my breasts were very stiff,
And they struck against your bosom :
Now how it is that blows of swords in the battle,
For soft touch of flowers you take ?

O armour-maker, remember to make
A loose-fit armour for my husband ;
Lest it fastens tightly
Blossoming into a lotus, as his person becomes full.

In days of peace and joy,
With delicate arms he clasps me ;
At the call of the war-song, his body stiffens,
He runs to the battle and forgets even to wear his armour.

O blacksmith's wife, I praise
Your husband now and again ;
As my hero attacks his enemy
From every blow of the enemy his sword saves him.

'Give me water soon', he says,
O how'll I serve him first ?
My mother-in-law carries water,
In consideration of the warrior's wounds she serves them.

'Run, my love, the enemy comes ',
Thus she said and wielded the sword ;
Her husband's clothes she put on,
Opened the door and fought and won.

O you wife of my husband's elder brother,
What for did you practise riding the horse ?
From a distance the enemy's drum we hear,
Hold the reins, ride and smash the enemy.

'On the frontier the war-drum goes on,
Get up, my love, the gate of the fort is opened ;'
The lazy lion heard it all right,
Yet turning his side he fell asleep again.

My female friend, every pain I'll endure,
Yet two things burn me—
The son that shames my milk,
The husband who shames my bangles.

All the menfolk gone to attend a feast,
The enemy suddenly attacks the womenfolk—
Daughters of a lioness, lionesses again,
How bravely their swords they wield.

"My female friend, your husband
Stands surrounded by many a people,
Around his head the money-lender, around his face the beggars,
And all round the enemy's warriors."

"Money to the money-lenders, charity to the beggars,
The flames of the sword to the enemy's warriors –
He'll pay the due to all,
Only if he stands all right."

Why did you play a trick, you wine-seller's wife ?
You thought my husband, mad with the wine of flowers,
Will think of love alone,
Yet it only adds to his courage.

My son, I brought you up amidst troubles,
Feeding you on my milk;
Never I knew, my darling,
You'll come back from the battle shaming my milk.

My husband, good you ran back,
Be ready now to wear my clothes ;
My beautiful bangles feel ashamed,
I may see you only in my next birth.

Tell the drummers to stop and go away,
The cocoanut, too, may be kept somewhere ;
My coward warrior comes home
Kneeling to his blessed feet you all salute him !

My ornaments and my shining clothes,
Hasten to wear, O warrior of battles, my love,
The black blanket on my shoulders, my days I'll pass in penance
You can save the money you ever spent on my bangles.

The goldsmith's wife feels sad and says :
'O Thákur, you lost your family glory,
O destroyer of my husband's wages for new ornaments,
Let your death remove you from this land of ours.'

The dyer's wife feels sad and says :
'O Rájput, why did you prove so false ?
For your wife s *Sati* rite, I hoped to dye new clothes,
Alas, my dream you've ruined !'

The perfumer's wife cries : 'What a pity !
Your cowardly home-coming spoiled my hope ;
Your wife ordered fresh perfume to scent her clothes for the
Sati rite,
Now who'll buy my costly perfume ?'

My husband is the innocent woman's pitcher,
Like a *Sati's* cocoanut he shares the battle,
Single-handed he goes to face the enemy,
O how'll I hope for his safe return ?

He stands on the earth, one foot in the stirrup,
The enemy's warriors all around him,
Even now my lord won't leave
The twirling of his moustaches.

Mad warriors have all come out
O don't you put your arms round my neck,
With lances the lancers cover the sky,
Everywhere are seen the armoured warriors.

My love, you'll think of both the families[1],
Love is a moving shadow ;
If you come back cowardly you'll get the pillow
Your wife's arm you'll get no more.

The woman inspires the warrior to fight heroically and the bard to sing louder making his language, taken

[1] This means he should save the honour of his father and father-in-law.

raw from the people's mouths, more and more terse.

The Rajput war-song has a force all its own. It is dynamic. The bard seems to paint like an artist, the brush gives bold strokes. His object in every song is to see from a new angle. Repetition cannot be helped, however, for everybody is at liberty to make an amateur attempt.

Even during the marriage, the Rajput girl is able to think of her warrior husband's lot. Many songs have survived that show us the girl's heart. Her power is the power of blood, for she is the daughter of a warrior father :

As he heard the marriage-drum,
The end of his moustaches went upward ;
Inside the marriage-grove
The princess marked her husband had to be a martyr.

The bended head while looking,
Capable of success over the enemy ;
At marriage the bride forecasted,
He'll live a short life.

At marriage I forecasted
Looking at him through the strings of flowers at the door ;
If his wife will have to wear *Lámbi*—the mourning cloth,
Many more wives, too, will have to wear it.[1]

At marriage I forecasted
Marking the ends of his moustaches that touched his wedding-crown,
He won't go alone to the heaven
With a full army behind him, he'll go.

At marriage I forecasted,
Marking a frown on his forehead,
He won't fall alone ln the battle,
When he has smashed many a warrior, he may fall.

[1]The suggestion is that he will kill many warriors before he is killed.

At marriage I forecasted
My lord is sincere,
With the strength of his sword
He'll eat the corn of the kings.

At marriage I forecasted
Marking the armour under the wedding clothes,
He came into the world
Destined to live a short life.

At marriage I forecasted
Beholding war-bracelet in his arm,
Bangles from my arms will soon be removed,
But only when many a woman's bangles are gone.

The war-song swept east and west, north and south. Even a fort of mud walls got appreciation :

The fort—all walls of mud,
The true heroes inside,
How will it fall in the fight
Even when the kings are angry on it, O Rajia ?

The rite of *Sati* was essential. The Rajput lived as he could, he died as he wished. Death for the country was beautiful. The martyr's wife believed that she will soon marry her husband once again in the heaven ; his mother never wept :

My female friend, he came with the drum-play
To marry me at my father's place ;
The drum now goes on, goes on,
O I'll pay in the same way.

My husband lies asleep in the battle-field
I've given birth to a son just now ;
O wife of my husband's elder brother, pray feed him
With your own son on your milk.

O traveller, take my message
To my father's village,
Tell him at my birth the metal plate he didn't beat,
Now the drum at full beat they play for me.

Cut into pieces, my son fell down in the battle,
His wife now goes to be a *Sati* ;
A hill of national honour stands before me,
Boundless is my joy indeed.

The dry-shelled cocoanut that the bride gets from the bridegroom as a present, symbolized the warrior whenever his wife had to be a *Sati.* In case the dead body of the hero was missing, she sat with the cocoanut. She played with it. *Agni*, the god of fire, took her to the heaven.

The heroes die to live. They live in song and legend :

Our parents we may forget,
Our relations, too; we may forget ;
Yet the story of great heroes,
The bard must ever repeat to us.

Bádal speaks for himself ; the war-song is proud of him. He was a contemporary of Padmini. His uncle, Gorá, was a principal Sirdar of Chittor. Padmini sought for his advice. It is said that Gorá and Bádal both gave the plan that was followed hy the queen. Alauddin had taken away the king. She sent a word to Alauddin that she would come to him with five hundred women. Bádal was only a minor boy. But he went with the Queen and the party. Five hundred warriors, dressed as women, sat in the palanquins. The palanquin-bearers, too, were warriors themselves. In the leading palanquin was seated a blacksmith, who was entrusted the duty of cutting the chains of the king. The Rajputs succeeded. It was Bádal, who most heroically took the king upon his horse behind him and fled away. Gorá died, but Bádal, the hero of the day, has been cherished through generations :

When Bádal got ready to go to fight
His mother came and said :
'What's this, my child ?
O a child you are indeed'.

'Mother, why do you call me a child ?
Never with tears I asked for a morsel of food ;
In striking my sword on the Shah's head, I'll succeed,
Then alone you may say : 'O bravo, my son !'

'A tiger, a hawk and a warrior,
They are never children ;
They ever hunt a big game
In a moment they catch it.'

Jagmal, the king of Marwar, defeated the Khan of Mandu. The song is put in the mouth of the Khan's queen :

At every step there lies a spear,
At every step, a shield ;
Bibi enquires the Khan :
'How many Jagmals are there in the world ?'

Ráná Pratáp raised the standard of Mewar in the Rajput History. He stood for full freedom. He lost the Chittor fort, for Akbar sent his bravest army to fight. He withdrew to the Arawalli Hills, where he lived with the Bhils and passed very hard days towards the end of his life. It is said, Akbar, garbed as a Rajput, came there to meet the Ráná, and when he returned to Delhi he was a changed man. But Akbar's counsellors, it is believed, again converted him to his former attitude.

Pratáp's blood was pure. His dream was great. Chittor must come back, he thought. His name symbolized the free Rajputana. Haldighát saw him attacking Akbar's commander-in-chief, Raja Mán Singh, who sat

on the howdah of the royal elephant. Pratap came on Chetak, his beloved horse, who put his forelegs on the trunk of Man Singh's elephant. Partap at once attacked Man Singh with his spear, but he saved himself by promptly bending down his head. The elephant was holding a small sword in the twist of his trunk, and he gave a deep cut on one of the back legs of Chetak. Pratap rushed back. He could not mark that he had failed in his attempt. The wounded Chetak, to his great sorrow, died by the side of a brook.[1]

Pratap was for the whole country. An entire epic poem could be devoted to him. He defined the free Rajputana in bold outlines.

There was a rumour that Pratap will soon beg Akbar for a treaty. Prithviraj Rathor, who lived helplessly with Akbar, somehow sent a sort of letter addressed to Pratap in the form of ten *doohás* :

Mother, give birth to such a son
As Rana Pratap ;
Akbar wakes up all startled.
Thinking of the snake by his bedside.

The earth all uneven, but his days all even indeed,
His honour the hero won't give up ;
Blockaded by countless kings,
Rana Pratap lives in the mountains.

O Rana Pratap, O matchless hero,
O annihilator of the hostile armies,
Who'll dare pound it under the hooves of horses,
As long as you stand upon the land of Mewár ?

[1] The Haldighat fair, held every year on the third of *Jaistha* month —the Pratap Anniversary day, attracts many people The raised platform, erected in memory of Chetak on the spot where he died, too, is visited.

Pratap's turban is genuine,
He comes from Sángá's lineage ;
Ever you kept it erect, O Rana,
Since you faced Akbar.

O Lord of Chittor, 'the one-fourth of a moment
As the bell rings,'[1]
Lies on your head, O King of Mewar,
O Rana Partap Singh !

O you King Akbar,
Your grandeur is great, O Turk,
They all made salute to you as they passed—
All the kings except the Rana.

A herd of one hundred cows,
Akbar has shut up in one enclosure ;
He didn't get his nose stringed—
Pratap Singh is a bull that roars.

All the Rajput *rajas* like bullocks
Came to Akbar's fold ;
The Rana can't bear the string—
Pratap Singh is a mighty bull.

If Pratap utters perchance
"King" (with Akbar) ;
The sun will rise from the west—
That offspring of Kashyap.

Should I twirl my moustaches,
Or with my sword should I kill myself ?
Write to me, my Diván,
One of the two things.

Some authorities believe that Prithvi Raj sent only the last two *doohas* to Rana Pratap. The following three

[1] The pun is upon *Pághari*, or one-fourth of a moment, that also means turban (*Pagri*)—the symbol of the Rajput's honour.

doohás, it is said, were sent by Rana Pratap to Prithvi Raj in reply :

The god Eklinga will make me utter
'Turk' alone in this birth ;
The sun will ever rise
As usual from the east.

Be happy, O Peethal,[1]
Twirl your moustaches ;
As long as Pratap is alive
To strike his sword on the enemies' heads.

I will rather bear a blow of the sword,
One's rival's glory tastes like poison ;
I wish you success, O Peethal,
In your discussions with the 'Turk'.

Ádhá Dursá, a contemporary of Rana Pratap, was a great bard. He composed stirring *doohás* in praise of the Rana :

Akbar is utter darkness.
The Hindu rajas are napping ;
The world's benefactor keeps awake –
Rana Pratap Singh stands guard on us.

Akbar is an unfathomable ocean,
The Hindus as well as Turks are all drowned in it ;
The King of Mewar therein
Looks like a lotus flower—Pratap Singh !

Akbar all at once
Marked all the horses, burning the skin with a hot iron ;
The rider of the unmarked horse
Is still Rana Pratap Singh.

Akbar will pass away,
Someone else will get hold of Delhi ;
O glorious Pratap,
Your fame will never pass away, O hero !

[1] The pet-name of Prithvi Raj.

Don't be proud, O Akbar,
That the Hindu rajas became your servants ;
Has anyone seen me Divan
Showing trickful feats before Akbar's railing ?

Abkar's mind is strong,
There is disunion among the Hindu rajas ;
The degenerate son of the Kafirs—
O let me catch hold of Rana Pratap Singh (Akbar thinks).

Akbar remembered them,
And the Hindu rajas presented themselves ;
Saviour of Mewar's traditions—
Pratap Singh, never touched his feet.

The head of the people's king
Never bends before the Moslems ;
Such an honour is kept
By Rana Pratap Singh.

The great path of the forefathers—
One must follow the same path ;
The full hero of the sword and generosity
Is Rana Pratap Singh.

He never bends his head,
Never he comes near Akbar ;
The honour of the sun lineage
Rana Pratap Singh preserves.

Akbar's diplomatic policy
Many Rajas overlook ;
The high traditions of the lineage of King Raghu,
Rana Pratap Singh follows.

The Hindu rajas lose their honour,
They give their daughters to the Turks ;
The wealth of the Arya lineage to-day
Is Rana Pratap Singh.

Many stones has Akbar gathered—
Many rajas ;
He couldn't get alone
The philosopher's stone—Rana Pratap Singh

Sanga for the sake of justice
Fought with Babar ;
On Akbar's feet
Rana Pratap Singh never falls.

For comforts all the jackals—the Hindu rajas,
Are now under Akbar's sway;
The enraged tiger
Never falls into the trap—Rana Pratap Singh.

Akbar is false and foolish.
His heart is broken, yet he won't give up obstinacy ;
On his feet he won't fall—
True to his oath—Rana Pratap Singh.

Akbar's heart is restless
Every night, every day :
Saviour of the rajas' honour,
Rana Pratap Singh is the son of the chief queen.

Even the warrior kings of the world
Press Akbar's feet
The protector of the cows—
Rana Pratap Singh, lives in Akbar's heart.[1]

Many rajas came to Akbar,
With bended heads they passed before him ;
Only a single man kept his head unbended—
The honourable Rana Pratap Singh alone.

The mighty rajas of Hindustan—
Out of sheer greed they all gave way ;
Taking the earth for mother,
Rana Pratap Singh worships it.

To smash the armies of Akbar
He goes ahead to face them and give a fight ;
In every mountain-pass he hits their pride,
At every step—Rana Pratap Singh !

[1] The bard says Akbar is ever afraid of Pratap.

He thinks of dying in the battle-field,
Without Akbar's slavery,
As a slave he would suffer,
And he won't live again—Pratap Singh !

To take away the wealth of the Gohil lineage
Akbar feels greatly greedy ;
He won't give a single cowrie,
The maker of an oath —Rana Pratap Singh !

Akbar is a big, foolish fish,
With a great strength he tosses up his tail ;
The son of the Gohil lineage
Is a deep ocean—Pratap Singh ![1]

To make the water look muddy daily
Like a crocodile Akbar moves ;
The Rana of the Gohil lineage is an ocean,
It never looks muddy—Pratap Singh !

Countless weapons struck,
Lacs of enemies were following him ;
The hero of battles with a slogan
Entered the town of Udaya Pur.

Akbar obstructs the way
With lacs of his Hindu dogs ;
The roaring boar
Beats many of them—Pratap Singh !

At heart he feels spiritless—
Akbar who ever shakes his head ;
Daily he feels redoubled in spirit—
Pratap Singh is never less spirited.

Why do you worry, O Akbar,
Carrying a string and a *poongi*, O snake charmer ?
Inside the basket
The cobra won't come—Rana Pratap Singh !

[1] Akbar cannot make it muddy.

With his queen he runs about,
The Gomrá fruit has the taste of nectar for him ;
But comfort with Akbar
Looks like poison to Pratap Singh.

He goes without food,
Hungrily like a lion he sleeps ;
Leaving aside his forefathers' path
Pratap Singh never steps forward.

Akbar is an elephant,
All drunken, he moves in his herd
Like the flesh-eater lion
Pratap Singh alone throws him.

All these belonging to Akbar—
These strong horses and elephants ;
Ever running after you,
They are all skeletons, O Pratap Singh !

The hero passed through many a suffering,
He earned great fame ;
O hero of justice and patience,
Your valour is blessed, O Pratap Singh !

Whose fame spread in the world,
Whose life is blessed in the world,
No infamy near him,
True to his oath, Pratap Singh is blessed.

The unfading and undying wealth is this
That one's good fame should live in the world ;
Both joy and sorrow of the body
Are like a dream, O Pratap Singh !

The heightened language of Adha Dursa's *doohás* is obscure here and there, yet the bard, as he sings them to-day in the same gusto, seems to make the people understand the meaning of the archaic expressions.

Sooráyach Tápraýá is another bard who sang in

praise of Pratap. Like Adha Dursa, he too looks difficult, yet his *doohás* seem to nestle in the folk mind :

Thirty-six lineages have been enslaved,
The Gahlot lineage alone is superior;
Don't you get angry, ye *Rájás* and *Ránás*,
As I make my statement.

The valour of Pratap Singh, King of Chittor,
Is a *Champá* plant ;
Akbar is a bee,
For he never came attracted by this scent.[1]

A sword on the elephant's forehead
You struck, O Pratap Singh,
You divided it into two parts,
As a wire cuts a piece of soap.

A sword of gold
You struck, O Pratap Singh,
As the rays pierce the clouds,
It went through the elephants.

The middleman, free from all attachment,
Such is Rana Pratap, the great hero ;
Altogether he smashed
The enemy's elephant forces.

The rajas eat from the earthen pots,[2]
But one who still eats from the leaf-plate,
You are such a person, O Rana,
You alone, O son of Udai Singh !

No more the old valour,
The Hindu rajas pay obeisance to the Turks,
Yet it is Pratap Singh
Who built temples over the mosques.

[1] The *bhramra* , or the large bee never visits the champa flower.
[2] They are converts.

So long as Rana Pratap
Doesn't pay obeisance,
The Hindus and the Moslems
Aren't one but two.[1]

Some of the anonymous *doohas*, too, apprise Pratap ; singing them the bard straightens up. The singing voice rises louder and louder in excitement :

Rana Pratap Singh struck
His spear into the enemy's armour,—
It came through as if the *jhingá* fish
Turned out its head from the net.

Rana Pratap Singh struck
His snapping spear—
As if a she-snake came out
With her mouth filled with her offsprings.

Akbar's horse-guards
Pratap smashed in such a way
As if the book of the Veda and Purana
Eell into the hands of monkeys.

Matchlessly Pratap struck his sword
The people of both the paths [2] admired him :
Piercing the victim's head-dress, it pierced the head,
Then piercing his body and the saddle, is went through the body of the horse.

Son of Udai Singh rode his Chetak,
With his sharp sword he came ;
On the Mirza's head he gave a heavy blow,
As if the lightning fell on the coppersmith's anvil.

The *doohás* are endless, the war theme inexhaustible. Hard and fixed, the old patterns seem to defy the hand

[1] If Pratap were a convert to Islam, there should have been no Hindus any longer.

[2] The Hindus and the Moslems.

of time. The heroic attitude persists. Of course, like folk-songs everywhere, the Rajput *doohás* 'have already gone through a process of selection', and only the best of the whole lot have survived.

The names such as Maharana Amar Singh, son of Pratap, Maharana Raj Singh, the grandson of Amar Singh, Ráv Amar Singh Rathor of Nagaur and Durgadas Rathor, another Marwar hero, at once inspire the Rajput blood. Valu Singh Champavat, Kesri Singh, Kalyan Singh, Kìrat Singh, Bheenv Singh, Ráv Kándhal, Padam Singh, Ràv Shekhájì, Sádul Singh, Jujhár Singh, Jorávar Singh, Sultán Singh and Oogo Rathor—they are all alive in song and legend.

Kushla Singh, who once saved the Bikaner Fort with his 5000 horse-guards, is dear to the bard :

> Kushla Singh asked the fort :
> 'Why do you weep, O Bikaner ?
> So long as I stand, if you fall,
> The sun will rise no more.'

The voice of a hero from Jálaur still echoes :

> If the sky is torn, the earth trembles,
> My armour is broken to pieces,
> My head falls down and my body suffers agony,
> Then alone Jálaur Fort may be lost.

The bard of Jaipur remembered his own champion :

> It is struck in the mud—
> This chariot of Rajput valour ;
> O Sultán Singh's son Sávant Singh,
> You alone are capable of taking it out.

Or :

> Gaur calls you at Ghátvá,
> Get on and come, O Shekhá,
> Your *lashkar* is capable of beating the enemy,
> We wish to see it.

The bard of Marwar would sing :

Mother, give birth to a son
Such as Durgá Dás,
With a loose turban on his head,
He supported the sky without pillars.

The bard of Mewar strikes another note :

O God, make me pigeon,
Of Jagat Singh's durbar—
Water I'll drink from the Pichhola tank,
Corn I'll eat from the state granary.

Meditating on the past, the bard would sing the song of Chittor, originally composed in the *Sánor* metre :

Says Jaimal : 'Don't you be afraid of the fight, dear Chittor,
I'll drive away the enemy,
In my hands you are safe
So long as my head like the lotus
Is active on my shoulders,
O you won't pass to the enemy.
Pray tremble not, O Chittor Fort,
I, the grandson of Jodhá, promise to fight for you,
My elephants will tread down the enemy's soldiers,
The Sultan may put his feet on your head
Only if my lotus-like head
Strikes against him and is cut off.'
The precious jewel of Dooda's lineage says again
' Persevere, Chittor Fort,
Fear not, nor doubt ;
First my head'll fall,
Then alone you may be unsafe.'
It was all true
What the great hero said,
Bravely with strong hands
He faced the enemy.
Jaimal first proceeded heavenward,
Then alone the Sultan could enter the Chittor Fort.

The bard of Marwar brings out the dying spirit of the enemy in his own style :

Nawab Inayat writes to the King,
' My tactics all failed, my Lord,
In Marwar the Rathors are smashing the Moguls,
They've blockaded us,
Our villages they've burnt
Boldly they wield their swords on us,
Hardly one or two of them we kill,
And lo ! ten or twenty attack us with swords.
O Alam Panáh ! world's mighty king,
Smashing Rajputs of one part,
Rajputana won't be ours ;
Listen to my request, my King,
Pray don't you put us in the mouth of death.
They'll leave us alive to see Delhi once more,
Only if they get the possession of Jodhpur.
Once King Akbar, too, had captured this land,
Allah alone knows
How many of our warriors were killed.'

The fort addresses the hero in some of these songs. This theme inspires the bard of Marwar :

' When I saw you coming to me, O Surat Singh,'
The Fort remarks,
Unshakable 'I became like the Mount Sumeru,
Even if one thousand calamities come unto me
Now I won't fall.
For the former defeat don't you blame me,
For that you'll ask the warriors
Who were on the guard.
O Sirdar, you saviour of your moustaches' honour,
I give myself to you,
When cowards ascend a fort,
It becomes a coward,
When heroes ascend it,
It's a hero,
Jewel of motherland, flag-waver, Ráv Márú,
O second Jaswant Singh,

Devoid of intoxication was I, the fort,
O hero of the big oath, readily you came,
And you reinstated my lost spirit.'

The Rajput is compared to a peasant. This shows the vitality of Rajput war-song :

Rajput heroism is a cultivation on the earth,
Glory is the seed,
The enemy's jealousy, the manure ;
O great farmer, your lance you use as a plough,
O you take to a wonderful cultivation.
The bones and limbs lie scattered—
A real ploughing indeed,
Smashing the enemy's soldiers,
You ploughed with your horse—
A real uprooting of the bushes indeed,
O Jagat Singh's grandson,
Who else can till a stony land ?
What a rich, ripe harvests the Rajputs gather !
O Rathor hero, heroism is like cultivation,
O son of Duláh, brave Lál Singh, the commander-in-chief,
Like the harvestor's scythe looks the sword in your hand,
Like corn-stems you cut the enemy soldiers' heads !

Extending from the beginning of the fourth century to the beginning of the tenth century, for five hundred years the Rajput war-song had its time. No more any warfare in Rajputana. No more any new growth of Rajput war-song.

Lálji, a Dadhvario bard of Rajputana, addresses his servant Noplá, marking the fall of the Rajput spirit :

Same horses, same villages,
Same harvests, same rajas :
But the spirit of the Rajputs
Has now escaped, O Nopla !

Another bard says :

Rajputs have gone, frauds are left—
All traitors of the country :
Those Rajput women are dead
Who could give birth to Rajputs again.

It is quickly followed by another *doohá* :

O Rajputs of to-day,
The dung-hills are better than you :
Accursed be your turbans,
Blessed are women's bangles.

Looking enquiringly towards the so-called sons o warrior blood, Kirpá Rám who always wrote addressin his servant Rájiá, switches his mind back to the past and feels sad :

Wounded by a pointed slip of wood,
They want wheat and *ghee* to eat as patients :
Such sirdars are more expensive
Than the bread, O Rájiá !

The bard, in fact, feels himself wounded by the fall of Rajput spirit. This makes him ironical :

O you poet-laureate, take to agriculture,
Develop love with the plough ;
Bury your songs in the earth,
Put over them now heaps of sand.

No war-songs without war and warriors. It was this sand, the ever-thirsty sand, that absorbed pools of warrior blood for over five hundred years. The Arravalli hills could not check the sand-storms. The ever-drifting sand of the desert has baen finding its way somehow in the green Rajputana, too. The old battlefields were not altogether free from sand that drank up every drop of warrior blood. Whether it was a battle on the

national front, or some foolish feud, the Rajput ever knew the words of the old song : 'O God you felt so proud after the creation of the horse. But you made a mistake, too. O you didn't put a saddle on its back.' He wished to keep the horse ever-ready. And the sand always took its toll of blood.

Blood and sand. No substitutes. History can repeat itself in a better form. Yes, blood and sand. Blood of heroes and martyrs. And sand—miles and miles of boundless and bare sand.

Songs of Sword and Rifle

THE rays of the morning sun carried their red and gold to the watch-towers of Landi Kotal village among the rugged Khyber Pass hills, where there are no flowers even in spring. The clouds and the azure sky made the Pathan village look peculiarly impressive. Even more impressive were the villagers themselves, upon whose features the warrior traditions of many centuries have been permanently etched. The women, although gracefully feminine, also bore a musket in their coal-black eyes. Every face in this little colony was aglow with the spirit of freedom and of honour.

In the outskirts of the village a tall figure in white moved slowly toward a shady slit in the rocks. His beard was grey, his face deeply wrinkled. On reaching his little cave, he took off his turban reverently and knelt on a slab. He raised his eyes, as the Namáz came to an end, cupped his hands and prayed:

"Allah ! O most ancient and hoary one, listen to my humble petition. None save Thee is capable of blessing my earnest desire with fulfilment. Listen to me, O Allah, as a true friend listens with undiverted patience and attention. Let me open my heart. I beg Thee to give me rupees enough for the purchase of a rifle, no more, no less. You must favour me with this ; for none save Thee is capable of blessing this, my earnest wish."

The rifle, together with the dagger and the sword, plays a leading role in the warlike drama of Pathan life. The Pathan villages in Ázád Iláqá (Independent Tribal Territory) have a number of rude munition factories where rifles are manufactured from scrap iron after the native designs. The barrel of the Pathan rifle is, as a rule, three to four inches longer than that of the modern English rifle. Some of the factories produce from one hundred to one hundred and fifty rifles a month. Though the machinery is crude, the Pathan rifles are said to be fit for service at ranges of from five hundred to fifteen hundred yards. The Pathans, young and old alike, never leave home without their rifles, since at any time they may meet an enemy. One frequently sees rifles of foreign make, captured in raids on the sentinel outposts of neighbouring political agencies.

The Pathan possesses numerous war songs, the national channels through which his warlike soul has found vital self-expression. The earliest pattern of the Pathan war songs is *landai*, a short series of fragments, known as *tappá*, or *misrá*. Though the tappá is a two-lined verse, it is not a couplet in the strict sense of the word, since its lines do not rhyme nor are they of the same metrical length. The first line, generally shorter than the second, is elastic; the singer is expected to lengthen it to fit with the other.

Compared with the later patterns of Pathan songs, the composition of landai is the simplest. Any person was expected to express his sentiments with a landai, and both men and women contributed to this anonymous song-harvest. Love and heroic sentiments are the themes of the early war songs. The wife of a Pathan warrior, as described in many of these old songs, is not only a princess of love and beauty, but also a patroness

of war. We can picture her behind the curtain playing an important role in the martial drama.

A warrior, who serenaded his sweetheart:

Your eyes are not unlike rifles, my love,
I am fatally wounded, a wayfarer on the highroad

knew that she was not merely a lover's plaything. She too could sing with heroic spirit:

O how I regret the kiss I gave him yesterday!
Alas! My love has fled toward home, showing his back in the battlefield.

In some of these fragments of early war-lore, we may hear the warrior and his wife talking together:

'Grant me, my love, a long kiss,
For I am to go on a crusade tomorrow to the plains of Atak.'

O I will never give my lips to you, my hero,
Unless you bring me the severed heads of the Kafirs.'

When the warrior returns victorious his wife sings:

O you the seeker of my jet-black locks,
Make a carpet of these now and, lying on it, forget all your sad dreams.

He is proud of his exploits; so his wife sings:

Why should you not show your skill with the sword, my love,
When I go half the way with you to the parapet in the field?

Some of the fragments of early war songs suggest interesting stories. Here is a piece, the heroine of which climbed the roof-top of her house to witness the feats of her warrior husband, who was fighting in a blood-feud near the outskirts of the village. Charmed by her moon-like face, he missed his chance and was killed by his rival.

Thus runs the song:

> Ah me! I with my own hands brought death to you,
> Alas! When the rifles were in full swing, I clambered to the roof-top.

The hot blood of the warrior who died fighting is sacred. She sings:

> I will crown my forehead with a drop of my hero's blood,
> It will put to shame even a spring-garden rose.

Satire, too, is found in the early war-lore. A warrior named Dilavar Khan (literally, a hero chief) is frequently satirized. Here are two specimens:

> O behold Dilavar Khan's remarkable chivalry,
> He fled away from a mongoose in a fallow field.
>
> O behold Dilavar Khan's extreme chivalry,
> He used his sword again on a rat that he killed yesterday.

The rose is not only the ideal of beauty and purity, but it is also the symbol of the warrior who never shows his back to the enemy. When the young heroes welcome war, the Pathan girl sings:

> The dew-fresh youths have gone to Táná,
> The crusade of roses will be fought today.

Landai songs are real love-songs, yet they echo most poignantly the rich voice of Pathan blood:

> I will make a cup of my lips,
> My hero comes home wounded, he'll be thirsty.
>
> Your success is sure if you wield your sword rightly,
> But success or no success, heroes embrace death in the battle-field.
>
> You take leave, my hero, and I weep,
> Wait a little till this *rain* is over.

I'm wounded by daggers, now take me to my sweetheart,
She'll stitch up my wounds, kissing me all the while.

Some show joy this way, some that way,
The Khattaks display their sword-dance in the battle-field.

If you go to fight, die there,
The Afridis find their graves in the battle-field.

Tirah Valley is a Kashmir of heroes, my love,
It has no place for cowards.

Say what you may, ye girls,
My sweetheart is a hero, praised as a clever swordsman.

The brave men never die on their beds.
In hot blood in the battle-field first they bathe.

May you never show back in the battle-field, my love,
Lest my girl-friends tease me with taunts of your cowardice.

My hero showed feats of his sword in the battle-field,
All the girls honour me, placing my shoes with their own hands.

All torn by swords, let you return to me,
Constantly kissing you everywhere, I'll stitch up your wounds.

Every *Landai* is a life-like etching. It speaks. It makes a living poetry.

As a pure love-song, the *Landai* never misses its point. There are thousands and thousands of such *Landais*, sung by men and women alike. But the heroic *Landai*, too, will always be sung. It will ever wake up the blood in the veins. It will ever be connected with the 'urgencies of daily life'. The warrior will need the pointed, psychological appeal. It is based on the old traditions, yet the new life awaits it anxiously.

The *Landai* comes direct from the soul of the Pathan.

It keeps his spirit alive. Now it glitters like a tiny mirror on the embroidered, bridal veil; now it flashes like a shield. It is significant every time. It is his love for his woman—the mother of warrior sons. It is his love for his hearth and home. It is his love for independence. He may live or he may die, but if he lives, he won't live a coward's life. The *Landai*, is his education, his culture, his realism.

A new note was introduced into the Pathan war songs when minstrels introduced a new song, known as *Chár-betá*. Unlike the *Landai*, the *Chár-betá* is a rhythmic song of considerable length, giving an opportunity for inspiring descriptions of famous Pathan battles and the exploits of popular warriors.

The profession of minstrel passed from father to son. Although the majority of minstrels were professional song-smiths, undoubtedly some were warriors who glorified their own deeds on the battlefield.

High-flown war songs dominated the song feasts, held in the village *hujrás* in winter, and under the open sky on summer nights, when the people gathered in large numbers to listen to the minstrel by the dim light of the smoking torches. But war songs were not confined to the song feasts or to the hours of ease. Some of them, set to marching tunes, were sung by the warriors on their way to the battlefield.

From the earliest days, brutality and barbarity have been prominent in the background of Pathan history. The people have always suffered from individual, tribal and intertribal blood feuds. But the wandering minstrels, who could play so easily on the deepest emotions and sentiments of the Pathans, made no effort to denounce the blood feud, nor did they urge a united nation.

It was only in the seventeenth century that Khushál Khán, the celebrated leader of the Khattaks, tried to arouse the Pathans against Mogul tyranny and unite his people into a nation.

Khushal Khan, who fought more than once against Aurangzeb, and was once imprisoned by him for three years in Agra Fort, was a great poet as well as a great patriot and warrior. Versatile in his poetic gift, he contributed numerous songs to Pushtó literature. *Diwán-i-Khushál Khán Khattak*, a collection of his poems and songs, has already been printed.

The following song, probably the last he wrote, is characteristic :

May Pathans be knit into a nation
So that their names may rise in glory.
My heart goes out to those full-blooded youths,
On starlit skies they wrote their story.
Better than a Mogul is our every mountaineer,
This is my wish, ye friends so dear :
Where the hill-breezes do not carry
Dust, trodden by horses of the accursed Moguls,
There in a grave so deep
May the free Khushal sleep.

Khushál Khán paints in great rough colours on a broad convas'. But he is at his best when he tells his own story. Here is his most popular war song :

Only a Malik was Khushal, the Mogul's slave :
No less than a King is Khushal, the free.
A golden saddle and silver shoes for my horse,
Were all I could get in Mogul service ;
In chains, ah me, have I been caught,
O what a kindness, what a return for my services!
Only a Malik was Khushal, the Mogul's slave.
No less than a King is Khushal, the free.

A rough blanket and *Anderi* dress
Is more than enough for us Pathans.

O we have no desire
For the Mogul's golden shawl.
Only a Malik was Khushal, the Mogul's slave:
No less than a King is Khushal, the free.

Many a blood feud turned into civil war. Some of the war songs that have survived from the early days of Pathan history describe such civil wars, when even kinsmen turned on one another.

One song of this type is of marked interest. It is characterized by strength rather than melody or poetic delicacy, offering a glimpse of a civil war that once broke out in the Marwat country between two factions among the Pathans, with Nawaz and Abezar as their respective leaders. The minstrel who composed this song was probably from the side of Abezar, a Bagu Khel Pathan hero. The minstrel seems to have centred his attention on the refrain, consciously artistic and full of warlike vigour. Only a fragment of the song has come down to us:

They are no longer asleep—
Lo there is a war in Marwat.

The Marwats are setting too high a value on themselves, and in every house they are taking sides.
War drums are being beaten in each village.
They are no longer asleep—
Lo there is a war in Marwat.

War drums are being beaten and Marwart is getting ready for the war.
O they have laid their matches to their black guns.
They are no longer asleep –
Lo there is a war in Marwat.

The guns are being fired and Katal Khan is withering like a flower.
O the enemy has defeated Katal Khan and the Bagu Khels have taken him in their shelter.

They are no longer asleep—
Lo there is a war in Marwat.

'Thou art not ready to accept my terms, O Nawáz!' broke forth Abezar;
'I will never rest till I rid my land of thee.'
They are no longer asleep—
Lo there is a war in Marwat.

The companions of Nawáz are the Khans of Marwat—
They have gone as refugees to Dera Ismail Khan and are asking for the Nawab's help.
They are no longer asleep—
Lo there is a war in Marwat.

'Before us lies a hard task, my Diwan,' said the Nawab;
'Do not tarry, but ride whither Nawaz and his warriors call us.'
They are no longer asleep—
Lo there is a war in Marwat.

A number of songs relate to the conflict between the Pathans and the Sikhs under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

It was in 1823 that the Bannuchis and the Marwats first faced the Sikhs.[1]

[1] "The Marwats never offered any combined resistance to the Sikhs and on each visitation either fled to the hills, carrying their flocks and herds with them, or remained and paid what they could of the *kalang* or arbitrary money and grain assessment put on each village or *tappá*. . . . Not so the Bannuchis, who from 1823 to 1845 were every second or third year invaded by a large Sikh army, which never entered their valley without fear or trembling; and although it generally succeeded in squeezing out of them a considerable revenue, never quitted it without having suffered severe loss at the hands of some stout rebel. Thus on one occasion Malik Dilāsā Khān, head of the Daud Shāh *tappá*, stood a siege of several days in his mud-fort, and repulsed the Sikhs after inflicting upon them a loss of over two hundred men."—*Bannu Gazetteer*, 1907.

The following song, still sung by Bannuchi minstrels, celebrates Dilásá Khán's exploit:

It is said, Dilasa has risen in arms against the Sikhs,
He is ready to give his head for the Prophet's cause,
His messengers are seen near Kakki.

The Sikhs have reached Kakki,
Tomorrow we must march against Lahora.
Now war drums are beaten in Dilasa's camps.
It is said, Dilasa has risen in arms against the Sikhs.

To the land of the Miris have the Sikh forces come.
The Miris too have declared war and not a horseman or a soldier is left behind.
Strong is the infidel when he meets his foe.
It is said, Dilasa has risen in arms against the Sikhs.

What is all this, my Allah,' cried Dilasa;
'I am afraid of Ranjit Singh, the infidel—
His forces are numbered in lakhs and in crores.'
It is said, Dilasa has risen in arms against the Sikhs.

For my Dilasa, this crusader, this is merely a sport,
'May my Allah watch over me,' he says,
O, around the white fort gather the spirits of the old martyrs to help.
It is said, Dilasa has risen in arms against the Sikhs.

The crusader Dilasa is the chief of the whole Bannu,
He is surrounded now by the forces of Ranjit Singh, the infidel—
O, the rifles, the matchlocks and the *Gumbarkás* are firing on him.
It is said, Dilasa has risen in arms against the Sikhs.

The crusader Dilasa is sated with the *mullás* of Bannu;
It was to them that he first sent his message about the declaration of war against the Sikhs,
But they had no love for the Prophet's cause.
It is said, Dilasa has risen in arms against the Sikhs.



Songs of sword and rifle



In the water........



.........And out of it



You Smile ?........



.........I do



Ups........



.........And downs



Blood and Sand



Blood and tears



Mother of Peacocks



Sons of Demons



They are Insurgents........



........She is not



Between her pots

The Wazirs have thrown in their lot with Dilasa,
They have cut off the heads of many Sikhs,
All the people are hastening to the scene.
It is said, Dilasa has risen in arms against the Sikhs.

Dilasa, the crusaders, attacked again and again,
He succeeded in slaying many Sikh sardars,
O the Sikhs fly scattered before him.
It is said, Dilasa has risen in arms against the Sikhs.

Some of the old songs refer to the battle of Nowshera. It was a great battle fought between the Pathans and the Sikhs. Akáli Phoola Singh and Hari Singh Nalwá headed the Sikh armies. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, known to the people at home and abroad as *Sarkár*,[1] was present on the front. The Pathans unfortunately suffered a great loss.

A war song, probably composed by Mullá Rashid, gives the first hand picture of the battle of Nowshera. Mullá Rashid as a real sportsman, acknowledges the heroism of the enemy. The song, like the preceding one from Bannuchi Pathans, is rather incomplete, for the ending lines, that as a tradition give the name of the ministrel, are missing. Obviously, it serves as a real tonic rather than a note of defeatism to the Pathan soul :

Lo ! here come the *Sarkár's* armies, O people,
Beyond Nowshera begins the battle.

O people, gather ye all who would honour Islam,
My people, it's a war between Muslims and non-Muslims.

On the Trakki Hill went on the crusade,
It was on Thursday and Friday night.

[1] "Although Ranjit Singh, in his relations to the Mussalmans to the west assumes a high tone, at home he simply styles himself *Sarkár*."—Masson, Journey, p. 443.

Hari Singh, the rival, is surrounded like an ox on the thrashing-floor ;
Someone said, Dost Muhammad, the crusader, gets ready for war at Kabul,
They killed the infidels with swords, matchless and sharp,
The King is in Kandhar, the hue and cry of his warriors comes to our ears.

Hari Singh wrote a letter to the Sarkar :
"Send more and more forces, for the Sikhs are now going toward Panj Tar."
Whence came the crusaders who prayed before Allah.
They went ahead, O people, and encamped near Peshawar,
As they unsheathed their Egyptian swords they flashed at the outset of the battle
Someone said, Dost Mohammad, the crusader, gets ready for war at Kabul.
How am to describe the way the batches of enemy soldiers with their hair all dishevelled ran before them, ye listeners ?
The King is in Kandhar, the hue and cry of his warriors comes to our ears.

They fought and uprooted the Sikhs,
They had to go and encamp in the waste land, ye listeners,
I have my holy saint who defeats all other holy saints,
When Ahmad Gul came all the minstrels began to tremble,
Like the crusaders, I've achieved success in my own crusade of songs.
Someone said, Dost Mohammad, the crusader, gets ready for war at Kabul.
Ahmad Gul is angry, run, run, ye misers, ye cowards,
The King is in Kandhar, the hue and cry of his warriors comes to our ears.

The mention of Mohammad Akhar Khan, the son of Dost Mohammad Khan, in the first stanza, is significant. It was he, whose bullet wounded Hari Singh Nalwa and thereby brought his death the same night in the Jamroad Fort, as a contemporary Panjabi poet, Qádir Yár, tells in his famous elegy on Hari Singh Nalwa.

Ahmad Gul, the minstrel, somehow, gives a note of humour in the end. With a typical dash, he proves his own superiority as a poet ; he also puts the misers to shame who would not reward him, and the cowards who have no right to listen to heroic songs. Surely, he knows his art.

With the decline of Sikh power after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh—Lion of the Punjab—in 1839, the Pathans of the Northwest Frontier saw that they were under British control. This opened a new chapter in the Pathan war song, which now told of the conflicts between the Pathans and the British.

The British in the early days found it difficult to govern the Pathans.[1]

The following song depicts the battle of Tirah Valley which took place between the Frontier Government and the Afridis. Maksud, the author of the song, was a *mullá*, a religious leader rather than a minstrel. A careful study of the text proves that he was a master of expression and also of rhythm, but Maksud has his limitations, too. He misnames Lockheart, the British Commander-in-Chief, as Locket, and he does not know much about the East India Company's connec-

[1] "The Afridis as a whole could hardly fail to be affected by the wave of excitement which swept along the Frontier in 1897. The Mullas saw to it. Rumours of an impending trouble and of the intended assault on the posts in the Khyber reached Peshawar on August 17, when owing to destructions elsewhere no regular troops were available to support the Khyber Rifles in the Pass. . . War with the Afridis was obviously inevitable. In October 1897, Sir William Lockheart's force invaded Tirah. . . . The following March the Afridis made formal submission, (paid) a fine of *rupees* 50,000,000 and surrendered the eighteen hundred breech-loading rifles which had been demanded from them."—*The Peshawar Gazetteer*, 1931, p. 85.

tions with the British Parliament. Thus runs the song :

Lo, here approach the British armies, O people,
The British, the Gurkha and the Sikh troops, all head strong, O people,
They want to take hold of Tirah, the land of heroes,
My people, it's a war between Muslims and non-Muslims !

The armies approach in wild array,
They first discussed with the Company,
The Governors wrote a letter,
They wrote about the Tirah affairs :
' What are the orders about Tirah's destiny ?'
The Parliament contemplated over it,
Dumbfounded for a moment.
' Make an attack, came the reply, and the armies were pale-faced and disheartened.
We'll cut the enemy to pieces, O people,
Lo, here approach the British armies, O people.
We must annihilate the enemy,
No matter if Kabul, Herat, Russia and the rest of the East stand in our way.
At Samáná you'll see my wild attack,
My people, it's a war between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The enemy moves toward Sāmānā: all powerless and wonder-struck.
The Afridis said : ' We rely on Allah,
Hurrah, war has come to our doors.'
All the tribal chiefs sat in a *Jirgah*,
On the Quran, they put their hands and said :
' Thief of the *Jirgah* will he be who is bribed by the enemy,
It's totally against our warlike honour.'
Up went the Pathan crusaders to the hill of Sarki,
They marched toward the Khyber
With Anar Gul, the leader, to face the enemy, O people,
Lo, here approach the British armies, O people.
Exclaimed the enemy Subedar : 'Lest the Colonel be disheartened,
He is our Sardar Bahadur, take care lest he be disheartened.'
Jamroz said : ' What a force the Britisher has ! '
My people, it's a war between Muslims and non-Muslims !

Onward rushed the Pathan crusaders from Jamroad to Shishágarh,
Thoroughly they plundered it all and then returned,
Thus they plundered in the name of holy war,
Every crusader proudly equipped with arms.
Up went the crusaders to the top of Lwargi Hill,
How could they leave the place without plundering it ?
They succeeded in ruining Lwargi Fort, fortune favoured them,
They did whatever they liked.
They left the Fort,
Victorious, they left for their homes, saying,
'While at leisure, we'll eat the booty,' O people,
Lo, here approach the British armies, O people.
The heroic song of Tirah I will now begin,
I'll sing of each clan's chivalry,
Each favour of Allah is a flower in colour.
My people, it's a war between Muslims and non-Muslims !

May Allah's favour be on the Zakká Khels,
Long live the hero Wali Mohammad, happy and victorious,
Hold your head high, O Khawáz Khan,
You gave your wealth to the people's cause,
May your dove ever be happy on the jessamines,
May the dove go on cooing, and flowers smell more than perfumes.
May Allah's favour be on the hero Malik Din,
May he add to the honour of his tribesmen, the Kambarkhels.
May Allah be the saviour of the Aká Khels,
May their enemy be fried in the boiling oil,—
They shrink from bribery, O people,
Lo, here approach the British armies, O people.
The sons of Tirah Valley almost hate bribery,
Everywhere they have established their honour,
They have saved the independence of Swát this time.
My people, it's a war between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Many Afridi clans are still to be praised,
All are heroes and look like the wild flowers of their motherland.
Our Shiah brethren are the root-cause of the British advance here,

First they encouraged them to flourish in their own country.
Trenches filled with warriors, we have surrounded the British soldiers,
They have now forgotten their disciplinary parades,
The British officers have sent the news abroad to their Company,
Now they won't think of the Khyber,
They are all so helpless,
Our heroes have surrounded them,
They are killing the new officers, O people,
Lo, here approach the British armies, O people.
I see their officers are finished their mission all dead,
I can count the enemy's soldiers—only fifty thousand are they.
Their backs they show and run in dismay.
My people, it's a war between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Showing their backs, they have gone, never again will they yell and cry,
Never again will they oppress the Muslims and Hindus of this country,
Now alone they could know Islam of Tirah Valley.
Each youth of Tirah is a swordsman.
May Allah never humiliate any one,
Where will be a clever fellow whom such a defeat will not mean an insult ?
They came to attack Tirah, they are all defeated and scattered now,
Never again will they come toward Tirah.
May Allah never blacken the faces of the Muslims.
Now sum up your song, O Mulla Maksud,
The enemy armies couldn't porceed any more, O people,
Lo, here approach the British armies, O people.
The enemy attack failed and they retreated, O Maksud,
They knew not by what way to retreat, O Maksud,
The heart of Locket, the enemy General, lies broken.
My people, it's a war between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Lo ! here approach the British armies,
The British, the Gurkha and the Sikh troops, all headstrong, O people.
They want to take hold of Tirah, the land of heroes,
My people it is a war between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Multán, a Zakká Khel Afridi employed in the Frontier Militia, is another favourite of Pathan war songs. In some way he came into conflict with the British and was declared an outlaw. The minstrel Abdul Majid pictures Multan as a true Pathan hero :

O fate is implacable, do what one may,
Treacherously surrounded was Multan—
The rose of the Khyber Pass—
O now who will raid the plains ?

Multan was a Zakká Khel,
He descended from the Ādam Khel country.
He entered the plains at Zákhel,
Near the brook that passes by the village of Surezaí.
He was seen in a cave,
O fate is implacable !
Near the cave was he seen, O, yes,
O keep trust in what I say,
The spy under the pretext of bringing him food,
Left him at dawn,
Do what one may !
Under the pretext of bringing him food he went away, O, yes,
He informed the police inspector,
Thus he lost honour in this and the next world.
The report was received in a telegram,
The army marched, O it was all dark.
Treacherously surrounded was Multan !
The British officers were stirred to action,
Someone said : ‘ Multan is there !’
The armies marched,
Troops set out,
In search of him ran all the cavalry.
O now who will raid the plains ?
O fate is implacable, do what one may,
Treacherously was surrounded Multan—
The rose of the Khyber Pass—
O now who will raid the plains ?

In open order they hurried on,
Theirs was a big crowd indeed,
Beside the dry brook they took up their position,

It was in the Kájuri tract,
They all scattered near the trench,
O fate is implacable!
All the Sikhs spread out,
All the Britishers and Púrbiá soldiers,
All the Hindus and the Muslims,
All were searching for Multan.
Let Allah's curse be on that swine of a spy!
Do what one may!
A man of great cunning was the spy,
He had Multan's full confidence,
But he was in the pay of *Sarkár's*[1],
Quite unconscious were Multan's companions,
Within a moment were they all captured.
Treacherously surrounded was Multan!
All unconscious, they were twelve men indeed,
I've assured myself of the fact,
I just came from their land.
The great host of troops swept away Multan—
The honoured son of Bárá Valley.
O now who will raid the plains?
O fate is implacable, say what one may,
Treacherously surrounded was Multan—
The rose of the Khyber Pass—
O now who will raid the plains?

Multan had sworn to die fighting,
The British officers were puzzled,
They were faced with a difficult task.
On the four sides were the jackals,
Multan was a lion, and his voice was so sweet.
O fate is implacable.
On every hand spoke the rifles,
The guns thundered,
The bullets whistled around Multan.
Multan's warriors first slew a British Captain,
Then they ruined the cavalry.
Do what one may!
After the Captain came a *Sardár's* turn,
They burnt him alive!
They themselves were in danger now,

[1] British Government.

They cried for safety.
Treacherously surrounded was Multan !
Multan then made a sally,
Scattering the enemy's soldiers before him,
He fought and fought
For four hours on the far bank of the brook.
O now who'll raid the plains ?
O fate is implacable, do what one may,
Treacherously surrounded was Multan—
The rose of the Khyber Pass—
O now who'll raid the plains ?

Multan made a sally, O, yes,
He was stained with blood indeed,
No more were his spirited warriors with him,
Those who remained still
Useless fellows were they all,
O fate is implacable !

But Multan had one young warrior,
A hero of national honour,
With a face like a blossoming rose,
He achieved martyrdom with Multan,
May Allah's favour be on his father.
Do what one may !
The Zakká Khels are mourning
May Allah's blessings be on them,
The hero Multan has died today,
His body is smeared with dust,
Alas ! Such a hero will never appear again !
Multan's day is over !
Treacherously surrounded was Multan !
Abdul Majid, the minstrel, has one wish,
Which he prays without ceasing,
Indeed he prays for that spy,
May that spy, O Allah,
Swing on the English gallows !
O now who'll raid the plains ?

O fate is implacable, do what one may,
Treacherously surrounded was Multan—
The rose of the Khyber Pass—
O now who'll raid the plains ?

Rahím Dád Khán's tragic story has come to live in many a song. Here is an elegy describing the people's sorrow for the great hero, commonly known as Rám Dád Khán. All the fragments follow the *Landaí* pattern and were collected from different villagers at different times. The piece, taken as a whole, appears to be a series of sharply etched pictures :

May all Pathan mothers give birth to sons
Like Rám Dád Khán, the worthy son of Ráni Zaí.

When Gazan Khan fights, he girds up his loins with a blanket :
Rám Dád Khán is seen with a shawl on his shoulders whenever he sallies forth.

Listen, ye people, listen with full attention to the noise :
The bang of Rám Dád Khán's German pistol vibrates in the air.

Rám Dád Khán's mother set aside the fresh baked *chápatties*,
Awaiting her son, who was out shooting partridge.

There will soon be a deluge of blood ;
For the enemies of Rám Dád Khán are murdering him on the Ghát upstream.

Why did you to bend your strong knee
In the dust of Kachi Kopar village, O Rám Dád Khán ?

Rám Dád Khán's mother is lamenting bitterly :
'Why didn't you cut your enemy to pieces, when you had thy sharp sword ready in your hand ?'

May Allah restore life to Rám Dád Khán,
We will not mind at all if he dies in the next scuffle, fighting for his village.

This time may Allah give back health to Rám Dád Khán,
His sister at Gálezai village has vowed to sacrifice buffaloes in charity.

They brought him drenched in blood, and his sister broke forth in the dirge :

'Lo, here comes our brother, dressed in rose petals.'

They brought him home on a blood-drenched couch,
His innocent sister mistook it for the palanquin of her brother's bride.

Rám Dád Khán's death's tidings have travelled through the land,
Twisting in agony weep the offshoots of the jungle trees, as the word passes by their side.

No longer can the flying cranes keep their lines in order,
As the news of Rám Dád Khán's death passes by their side.

Thus came the news of Rám Dád Khán's death.
No lights were to be seen last evening on the mound, where lies his village Kachi Kopar.

Thus came the news of Rám Dád Khán's death.
The young girls left their red-hot ovens unattended, and their hearts went out for him.

Awake, O Rám Dád Khán, awake from the sleep of death and pray to Allah.
Lo, here comes the little son to play on your broad chest.

Elevate Rám Dád Khán's couch so that the ladies of the Khan's house may have a glimpse of him from their enclosures,
Otherwise they will rush out of their purdah.

Cover Rám Dád Khán with shovelfuls of dust,
But leave his hands out that his graceful fingers may entertain the guests.

Bury a few china plates with him in the grave,
He may expect guests in death even as in life.

Rám Dád Khán's house contains four rooms and four verandas,
But assembled under the burning sun are seen the wailing womenfolk.

From street to street goes Rám Dád Khán's old mother,
Searching out the precious marks of Rám Dád Khán's shoes.

From street to street goes Rám Dád Khán's old mother,
Searching to see if someone has found her son's kerchief
lying about.

Rám Dád Khán's old friends do not wear blossoms in their ears
even when it is spring,
Lest his mother droop her head in sorrow as she passes by.

A heap of nose-rings is seen under the chanár tree,
Where Ram Dad Khan's grave lies.

Freedom still makes a living poetry for the Pathan. The hearts of men and women living in the Independent territory are still aglow with the old spirit and they sing spontaneously denouncing everything that may mean slavery one day :

Mulberries are ripe and prunes are blackening :
O what care we for the Sarkár's proffered food ?

The minstrels still travel the length and breadth of Pathan country. War or no war, war songs they must sing. They entertain the masses with the traditional songs and the new songs that they compose. But it is the same Pathan muse in every song, new or old. Every Pathan war song is a gospel of sword and rifle.

5

Reelo, Chait Parab and Leja

"You will like to pick up Halbi folk-songs, too, when they are so near," remarked my friend Pooran Singh at Jagdalpur, as he gave me his book, *An Introduction to the Halbi Language.* "Halbi is a language of no less than 1,74,681 people of whom 1,71,293 souls live in Bastar State alone," he went on to say, "it is my mother-tongue and I am proud of it."

Halbi is originally the language of the Halbá people in Bastar State The word Halbá must be an abridged form of *Halbáhá* (lit. peasant), and almost all the Halbás today are tillers of the soil. Some other castes, however, have also adopted it as their mother-tongue. Day by day it is acquiring the character of a *lingua franca* throughout Bastar—a veritable mine of dialects. Even amongst the Gondi-speaking Máriás it is Halbi that at once becomes the second language for the local interpreters. Mr. Hyde, the Administrator of Bastar in 1938, called it "a valuable means of inter-communication."

But Halbi failed to charm a great linguistic scholar like Sir George Grierson. "It is a mechanical mixture of bad Marathi, bad Oriya, and bad Chhattisgarhi," he declared. But Pooran Singh was not willing to accept this criticism. "Sandwiched between the Marathi, Oriya and Chhattisgarhi speaking areas, it is only natural that Halbi should be under their mixed influence," he remarked, "but it is rather sad that Grierson calls it a

mixture of merely the bad elements of these languages."

I at once found a regular collaborator in Pooran Singh. At every typical word he would stop and give along with the literal meaning, its whole background and purpose. Of course, he was not capable of reproducing the beautiful and thrilling tunes of the Halbi folk-songs. But he helped me to understand the poetical depths and I felt no linguistic difficulty.

REELO

One remarkable type of Halbi folk-songs is *Reelo*.[1] It draws its strength from the everyday life of the people. Occasionally it is followed by a full-blooded romance giving birth to many a new song in its turn. Every young man must respond to the call of *Reelo* songs as the bees do to the flowers of the new season. I remember a party of tall, well-built youths. All of them solemnly agreed to sing to me their favourite *Reelo*. And their glorious voices put life into the song :

The Girl

How can I bear to live
With my husband ?
Thrashings he gives me daily,
Every day we fight.
I must leave him one day
For you, my beloved.
Blossoming in the forest-side
You are my *Rosoná* flower
And you are my singer of *Reelo* songs.

The Boy

You say that you'll come to me.
But who'll give me money ?
Wherefrom shall I pay the price

[1] In some parts it is known as *Leero*.

In cash to your husband?
I would prefer to be without a girl.
And then I know
What an average woman is like :
For her husband she serves gruel,
For herself she keeps the cooked rice.

The Girl

Well, I too know
The men of *Kal Yug.*
Today they get rich
Tomorrow they drive away their poor wives.

The Boy

Your comment I understand
My *Rosoná* flower !
But it is like the noise
That comes up while you pound the *Chivrá.*

The Girl

O I fail to compete you,
My dearest love!
Now go on singing *Reelo*
And I shall be a calm listener.

The Boy

For six months or one full year
I shall keep my eye on you.
I wish you were a good girl
Not stupid like a buffalo.

The Girl

Around a jar of *Landá,*
The boys of Tekrágurá village have assembled.
Water is served from the spring of Singan Pur village
Landá, the rice beer, comes from Lámker.

" The very first *Reelo* must have been sung by a girl," Pooran Singh told me. I agreed and quickly quoted to him Ananda Coomaraswamy's words : "If we study the

folk speech anywhere in the world, we shall see that it reveals woman, and not the man, as typically the lover." [1]

"You can imagine the girl offering a cup of Landá to her beloved who sits amidst his friends, her winning smile lending a unique meaning to the Reelo song," he at once emphasized. "The Reelo singers, nurtured in a tradition of long standing, compare each other with the yellow *Rosoná* (also known as *Rachná*) flower. *Mári Rosoná*, or the *Rosoná* flower of the plain, is the name of a kind of friendship between boys and girls, and they commence it by taking a sacred vow of faithfulness and symbolically exchanging the *Rosoná* flowers.

The Reelo is not originally a dance-song. The boys and girls sing it extempore as a solo, but soon it develops into a duet and invites the thrilling dance music. The Halbi-speaking Muriá youths sing sitting round the camp-fire on winter nights, resting under the shade on summer noons, working in the fields, or with a comparatively stronger impetus during a wedding. Here is a wedding *Reelo* :

The bride

On the wayside mango
The peacock goes to roost—
His moustaches are growing!

The bridegroom

Yes, my *Rosoná* flower,
The peacock's moustaches are growing.
But who will hear you at length?
Make haste and be brief.

The bridegroom is in hurry to take his bride home. No time should be wasted. No formal jokes. No gossip. But there is no end to the Reelo song :

[1] Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Dance of Siva*, p. 96.

The girl

Dadak, dadak, water is falling,
My Rosoná flower!
Peep into your mind and see
If you can accept my love.

The boy

Well, you ask me
To peep into my mind
Accept this *Keorá* flower
From my hands, my love.

The girl

I should accept your *Keorá* flower, you say.
I take it with love and care.
When you take leave now
Don't forget me altogether.

The whole fun and satire of peasant life may be seen in *Reelo* songs:

The husband

This painted basket has been brought
From the village of Chingpál;
And the boy who made it
Belongs to Negánár.
No plough, nor bullocks have I, ah me!
Unavailing goes the wetness of the fields!

The wife

Unavailing goes the wetness of the fields, you say.
Why not ask your village friends
To come to your help,[1]
If you have no plough nor bullocks,
My Rosoná flower?

[1] *Bethiá* is the original name of the ancient system of co-operation. The village folks, turn by turn, join in groups to help their weak and poor neighbours, not necessarily relations, in the field work. The people who come to do this work are called *Bethiás.*

The husband

You suggest help, my love
From my village friends.
I was teasing you.
The plough and bullocks are there,
But, alas ! there is no strength
In my body at all, my love,
The sun is setting.

The wife

Yes, my Rosoná flower,
The sun is setting, you say.
But, like the naked roots of Jamálá tree
That stands on the river bank
Your moustaches are growing strong and unruly
If not *Bodi* and *Mehar*,[1]
Cultivate the *Goindi* rice,
You'll have a very rich harvest
In a circle of forty sheaves
You'll place the harvest, my Rosoná flower.

The husband

Keep up your blessed speech
Patiently I hear, my love,
But, how long will you go on ?
My soul belongs to *Yamá*, the god of death,
And this my body will go to dust.
My days are numbered :
I'll bend to the hill-breeze,
Today I talk to you
Tomorrow, I shall not.

The wife

To talk to me tomorrow
You wouldn't be here, you say.
Give me names of your gods,
My Rosoná flower !
For your safety I shall pray to them.

[1] Coarse varieties of rice, cultivated on the hill slopes where very little water is required : 'd' in *Bodi* pronounced as in 'body.'

Sometimes even the best part of a *Reelo* remains but a solo song. Of course, after every few lines in this case the *Reelo* singer repeats the last item of the preceding line. Given to the use of satire, the monologue throws light on everyday village life. Bhikàri, a sunburnt peasant of Bilchar village, sang to me a *Reelo* of this type:

Now my heart is glad, my Rosona flower,
Harvesting and threshing, all over;
O I am at leisure now.
At leisure, my wife,
Spread the mat, for my eyes are heavy with sleep.
Eyes are heavy with sleep, my wife,
The child weeps and disturbs me.
The child weeps, my wife,
I, your husband, feel tired of quietening him.
'Whither have you been ?' I ask,
And it makes you lose your temper,
Make you lose your temper, my wife,
In the forest reserve of Títargáon a leopardess roars.
The leopardess roars, my wife,
What is the effect of it on your heart ?
On your heart, my wife ?
Bhaen, Bhaen, Bhaen,[1] it fills my heart with fear.

In another song Bhikari hit his wife Jhumri:

The *mahuã* oil you apply to your hair,
And sitting on an old *máchi*[2]
You comb your shining hair.
You comb your shining hair, my love,
Quarrelling with your husband,
You run away to your mother, my love.
'What makes you come, daughter ?' asks your mother;
'My husband, that black-faced one, has beaten me', you cry,
'My husband has beaten me,' you cry, my love,
'Get out, you black-faced one,' you shout
As your husband comes to reconcile you.

[1] *Bháen* pronounced nasally is a sound symbolical of the lonely forest spaces.

[2] A seat of wood and string.

Everybody laughed as the song closed. "Do not misunderstand me, Jhumri darling, it is not you that I have addressed in my song", Bhikari told her before everybody. But she had understood him. Laughter lurking in her eyes, she had the look of a smart modern girl.

CHAIT PARAB

"Here is a song, originally sung in the month of *Chait*," remarked Pooran Singh, "so you see that it is sung in Spring, but it is necessarily a love-song and has very little to do with spring-time."

The *Chait Parab* songs are not essentially Halbi. Originally favourite with the Bhatrás, who speak a mixed dialect of Oriya, they are almost Oriya-like in sound and colour. But they are very popular in the Halbi zone.

The *Chait-Parab* singer would like to commence his song with a sort of prayer to *Mahámái*, *Kálinká* and more often *Danteshwari*—the local goddesses. The last is the tutelary goddess of Bastar Raj family.

Thus sings the *Chait Parab* singer, suggesting that the blessings of the goddesses enhance the beauty of his song :

Victory to you, goddess *Mahámái*.
Victory to you, Mother *Kálinká*
In your names I commence my song.
Be kind and make my throat your abode.

And when the village boys and girls enter a competition even the goddesses are expected to take sides. Thus sings the leader of one party :

'The goddess *Ranokasini* is worthy of my salute.
In her name I begin my song, and success must be mine everywhere.
In the temple, the drum-play goes on,
My salute be to the god of the battle.

And the rival leader returns:

You saluted your god and goddess. To whom should go my salute?
In the name of Mother *Máoli* I sing, and to her goes my salute.
On the temple door, the parched rice is spread,
Be kind mother and make my voice like that of a *Koel*.

On the first day of the *Chait Parab* festival they go from door to door in the village collecting small coins. This money is spent on liquor that they share together. Songs go on before the goddess throughout the night and every now and then the music is enhanced by dancing. Next morning they all leave for the neighbouring villages, where they sing, and dance at every door and collect money to be spent on a good public dinner that takes place on the last evening of the festival. It is primarily the festival of full-blooded boys and girls who are not yet married. The newly-married boys and girls in their own villages cannot resist the temptation of joining this celebration of love, beauty and youth. The party of boys and girls that goes about singing, keeps a few elderly persons, too, who save it from going astray. Throughout the month of *Chait* these song feasts go on. The girl members of the party challenge the boys of the village and the boys sit to compete with the boys of the village separately. The songs are both old and new and most of them are sung extempore. The party that wins charges little presents of flowers like the rose, *champá*, jessamine and *hazáriphùl* or even of parched rice aud molasses from the defeated boys and girls, who, as tradition has taught them, never again in their life sit in contest with any winning member individually. Just after the announcement of the result of a contest, a defeated girl falls in love with the boy who wins; with mutual consent, they run away to some forest or hill wherefrom their parents bring them back after having

given their final consent to their marriage. Such a marriage is known as *Paisá Mundí.* In olden days, the boys and girls used to begin the song contest with a definite promise that the defeated girl will marry the boy who surpasses her. One thing is clear even today. The girl, defeated in a Chait Parab song contest, carries on a life-long admiration for the winning boy and whenever he comes to see her at her father-in-law's place after her marriage, she offers him cordial hospitality and her husband cannot object to it.

Apart from the actual festival in the month of *Chait,* the *Chait Parab* songs may be sung on other occasions as well, especially during the wedding feasts when it gets a new name, *Mundi Mángto,* or "the asking for the ring". The defeated boy is forced by the winning girl to present a ring to her.

The *Mundi Mángto* further developed into a popular custom. Whenever the village girls come to know of the arrival of a guest in the village, they assemble before him at night with a challenge to fight a contest. Even a State official, on his visit to a village, at once becomes an object of attraction to the *Mundi Mángto* girls of the village.

Here is a *Chait Parab* duet that emerges from a living poetry :

The Girl

The coloured earth is of various hues.
Lo ! The black crow has taken wing.
Now no more salutes to the goddess,
Come on with your songs of love and beauty.

The Boy

Come on, my dearest girl,
My heart swells with delight.
Every night, my fair-faced singer,
I have seen you in my dreams.

The Girl

You have sung your song all right,
But it has gone astray :
You can't make a beautiful song,
You only pick up the remains of others meals.

The Boy

Your fanciful *sári* is dark like a cloud,
You have thrown it over your shoulders :
It is by the grace of God, my love,
That we meet today.

The Girl

At a full day's distance on foot is the village of Maidalpur,
Buy me some molasses, my love,
Offer me also a home-spun kerchief
Like a *Champá* flower that remains fresh throughout the year.

The Boy

Breakable is the dry *Sál* leaf,
Not so the *Bodal* leaf,
Both your cheeks, my love, are beautifully tattooed,
Now sing me little songs.

The Girl

The weekly *Hát* market got late by one week,
Our meeting is late by full one month.
Lo! the running doe is caught
In the snare of the weak paddy-straw rope.

The Boy

I love you, sweet darling,
Be my life-companion now,
In the *Madhuban*, the forest of love, O girl,
I have long been searching you.

The Girl

Heavily it rained this year,
There came a boisterous flood :
Come away with me, you say,
But I can't, my youthful boy, my home is far away

The Boy

Unploughed for long eighty years lies the distant field, my love,
The shade is sweet under the plantain grove :
Like a hard worker I shall labour and feed you,
But you won't yield, my love !

The Girl

I digged a tank, I also planted a garden,
The water of my tank is sweet and clear :
Far away from me, my darling,
You should drink water.

The Boy

The cobra crept along the *Salpi* tree !
With a jar of liquor on my head
I went to your father,
Alas ! he refused to make you my bride.

The Girl

Heavily blows the wind, everywhere the sky seems cloudy.
Here is the Cobra, my love,
From the grip of a she-Cobra like me,
How will you come out victorious ?

Often the *Chait Parab* song makes direct references to everyday village life. You can actually see the workers in the fields :

We, the labourers, have come,
In a row we stand now :
Come on, O singer of songs,
Say yes and begin your song.

The song of the widow makes you sad :

Alas ! there is nothing to be cooked in the widow's house,
She works hard to fill her belly which is of a hand's breadth :
Whatever she gets, be it half-cooked or rotten,
She jumps to eat but only starves !

Some of these songs show the contrast between the life of the Bhatrá peasants and the Máhrás :

Poor Bhatrás live upon the fruits of *Sál* and *Sieume*,
But the Máhrás are happier :
As long as the Káwri [1] is on your shoulders,
You cannot die of hunger, my love.

LEJA

In Kohkápál, Bilchur and Dharampur, the surrounding villages of Jagdalpur, I found out many specimens of the Lejá song. It had more than two varieties and enjoyed the goodwill of the Mirgans, the Máhrás and the Ghásís.

"It is not easy to trace the significance of *Lejá*," Pooran Singh went on to say, "but *Lejá* is the same as the Hindi Le já (lit. take it). Perhaps this song was originally sung by the village folks giving a send-off to some dear one. Everyone who joined in the chorus said to the departing person : "Take these good wishes and love of ours along with you." And as time passed, there remained only *Lejá* (take it) as a relic of the original wish."

The Mahrás repeat *Lejá* thrice at the beginning of every song, while the Mirgans prefer to close with *Lejá, Lejá, Lejá, Re Lejá!* In the village of Kohkápál, a young Máhrá boy sang to me a Lejá of unusual length. It was composed of a long fragment, meant for a rhythmic recital in the beginning, and the usual short piece in the end:

Hurriedly come to me, my Koili,
Give me a sweet embrace :
The *Mándiá* corn I have is good,
And smoothly runs the grindstone.

[1] *Káwri* is the bamboo pole from which baskets hang on both sides. It is carried on the shoulder while taking loads from one place to another.

My name is Hariá, dear Koili,
How I wish to live with you,
You look like a sugar-cane:
Search you I must,
Lejá, Lejá, Lejá,
It is not merely a *Lejá* song,
The actual news it brings from Bentá Bhejá village.

There is a note of advice from the Lejá singer to the village flirt:

Lejá, Lejá, Lejá,
The road is full of sharp bends.
Don't you walk over the clods, my girl,
You'll fall down.

And a bashful girl's lover had his own *Lejá* :

Lejá, Lejá, Lejá,
Behold the *Amarbel* creeper,
O what makes you hide and be busy inside?
Just come out and play with me.

Another Lejá compares the sweetheart's face to the slender new moon:

Lejá, Lejá, Lejá,
The new moon has arisen:
Even if you are as big as a mountain
I cannot be satisfied by looking at you for a short while.

"Don't you connect the new moon of the first line with the later portion," Pooran Singh was telling me, "in the *Lejá* song there is very seldom an affinity between the first line and the later portion; its significance is only limited to its last word for, according to the original verse scheme, it rhymes with the ending word of the song. The moon in the present song appears only by accident. Don't think that the face of the beloved is compared to it. At the most you may make the first line a simple description taking into consideration that in the later portion the singer shows his urge for

a full and long view of his beloved's face. So I cannot agree fully to what you say." But to me the first line of the *Lejá* song really appeared to be like the meditative brow of a person, suggestive and serene. "If the *Lejá* song is a snapshot", I argued," the first line must be taken as a close background, enhancing the form and texture of the song." And it was after a long discussion that Pooran Singh and some other Halbi scholars agreed with me.

Here are the words of a summer song :

Lejá, Lejá, Lejá,
Behold the *A'nvari* and *Jám* trees that stand together.
Wear your shady hat, made of bamboo and leaves, my prince,
The sun burns your face !

Again the *Lejá* turns into a rain song :

Lejá, Lejá, Lejá,
It rained in showers,
My song went along with it
The rains went on throughout the night.

Or it will be a harvest song :

Lejá, Lejá, Lejá,
Behold the leaves of the *A'nvari* and the plantain :
Behold also the plants of the *Goidi Lakro* paddy
Bent down with grain in the sloping field.

Or just a note of grievance :

The house with roof supported by nine pillars and eight beams
Belongs to your father, my girl,
As a servant I have served your father since my tender days,
Alas ! no sign of success so far to win your hand.
Lejá, Lejá, Lejá, Re Lejá.

Or the deep grief of the wife of a morose husband :

On the distant berry tree speaks the bird, speaks the bird *Gundlu.*
With a thorny stick in his hand he beats me, sister,
My leg below the knee is badly swollen.
Lejá, Lejá, Lejá, Re Lejá.

Here is the marriage-feast as seen by the village satirist :

Turbud, turbud, sounds the *Tudbudi* drum, the *Nisán* drum, too, sounds rapidly,
Look at the marriage-feast :
Everyone is served on leaves
With the poor curry made of *pipal* sprouts,
And that, too, in small quantity.
But big leaf-cups full of rice-gruel are served all right,
For it does not cost much.
Lejá, Lejá, Lejá, Re Lejá.

Or a hit on a loose woman :

A *Koel* here and an other coming from the other side of the river,
For God's sake leave me now :
You have brought disaster on all sides,
You husband-eater widow !
Lejá, Lejá, Lejá, Re Lejá.

The *Lejá*-singer addresses the old flirt, too :

I brought bamboos and made a bundle.
O mother of five children,
You are attaining your second youth !
Lejá, Lejá, Lejá, Re Lejá.

The ear-rings are essential :

Your face is like the *Sál* leaf !
Combing and braiding your hair
You have coiled your pigtail at the back,
But your ears are unadorned.
Lejá, Lejá, Lejá, Re Lejá.

The peasant under debt has his own voice:

Lejá, Lejá, Lejá,
Dying of labour I raise the harvest
How terrible to pay the *Dhedá*[1] corn
To the *Saukár*, the village money-lender!

Nothing is hidden from the police:

Lejá, Lejá, Lejá,
I will prepare pickle
And if it goes wrong
I shall report to the police.

Every day, every week, the new *Lejá* is composed extempore. It is pure gold. The Halbi folk-lore is proud of it. Here is a long range of *Lejá* songs sung by the Muriá boys and girls:

"Léjá, léjá, O dear vine, take my one-stringed fiddle
To the flooded river, plunge in and play with it.
Léjá, léjá, O sliced gourd, in the long days that have passed
Since I last saw you, you have grown plump and lovely.
Rain has fallen and fallen, the pond is brimming. But, dear one,
Do not touch me, for my heart jumps to see you.
We have been separated long, too long, my darling,
And now, léjá, O léjá, we must live together.
Beloved, I'm carried away by the pock-mark on your dark, shining face,
By the glossy hair on your dear head.
Throw a fiddle at the plum-tree, and the fruit will fall.
But who will soften the Englishman to the tale of our love?
My tender fern, he is not our own Bastar-born king
Who would listen to our tale, and you would walk before him
In your loveliness, and melt him to sympathy!
Léjá, léjá, O wild berry, would you leave me?
Léjá, léjá, though, wealth of my heart, I know
That you are not mine, nor for me to touch, yet

[1] The corn taken as seed from the shopkeeper is often paid back with heavy interest— $1\frac{1}{2}$ times—at the harvest. It is called *Dhedá*.

Léjá, O léjá, desire will flare in your heart ;
Will you come then for a while to my house ?
Léjá, léjá, O wealth of my heart, the summer rains
Have soaked the fields, the rains of June.
My heart blazes with passion, my flower
(Let go my loin-cloth a moment ; the white girl is coming).
Léjá, léjá, sweet bug of my bed, what have you done to me ?
I see you, and all our past love leaps to remembrance.
Why though you snuggle, do you struggle, why cry and try
To keep yourself back, though I've tumbled you down ?
Léjá, léjá, give in, give in, shining brow,
Or, by the Mother ! my love will become hate.
Léjá, léjá, O wealth of my heart, the summer rains
Have soaked the fields, the rains of June.
My heart blazes with passion, my flower !
(Let go my loin-cloth a moment ; the white girl is coming.)
Léjá, léjá, sweet saunterer, léjá, O love,
Lend me your jewels, for me to go to Jagdalpur fair.
Léjá, léjá, O love, you will remember your promise,
For as the deer leaves tracks, I have left an itch in your body,
And I shall learn how to tell the English ruler about you.
The wild beans and berries have dried up under the hill,
But your memory came fresh there to me at night,
And I could not sleep, léjá, O Léjá !
Yé, dé, O little goldfish, O shining brow,
Do not cry over what happened last night ;
Léjá, léjá, come, dear vine, let us enjoy ourselves first
And then, if you will, tell the foreigner
The rain is falling, sweet bug of my bed,
Why should I listen to your silly pleading ?
Why are you striving and crying, pulling and pushing ?
You'll be all right, yes, you'll be all right.
There, there, sweet bug of my bed, dear wild berry,
Lend me your plough and bullocks,
And I will sow a crop of maize.
Léjá, léjá, ré léjá ré, who will play my one-stringed fiddle ?
All night I thought about you. Come and plunge and play in my pool !
I will play with you, as a shuttle flashes through the warps of a loom.
Listen, O listen to the pouring rain of June.

The wild beans and berries have gone dry under the hill,
And you tell me to sing to you about God.
God is everywhere in the world ; but your singer,
Your singer, my flower is with you in Bastar.
Léjá, ré léjá, ré léjá-ré, sweet saunterer, my berry, my plantain-vine,
You know, one who walks on the edge of Gangámoondá lake
Is bogged in the mud ; but that mud is the place
For sowing rice seeds, léjá, léjá, O léjá !
Yé, dé, burn, my berry, burn, my only jewel,
And think and long for the night.
The tall plantain-vine bears a fine cluster of fruit.
Be ready for me, dear bug of my bed, comb
And decorate your hair, my only jewel, for to-morrow
Desire will fire me and I shall come back to you."[1]

There is a Halbi proverb : *Léjá asan geet nihái*, *i.e.*, there is no song like the Léjá. It has no end. Its words never die. It has power over the whole world.

The forest is mysterious, but more mysterious is the Muriá village. The *Léjá*-singers, youths and maidens, have their own 'free republic'. It is their *Ghotul*, or the village-dormitory. Every evening they gather to sing and dance and sleep together in the *Ghotul*. The eldest boy is the *Silledár*, or the supreme leader ; the eldest girl supervises the girls, the *Jháliváru* as she is called. The parents remember their own *Ghotul* days ; they never interfere. Every girl is a *motiári* and she has her own darling, the *chelik*. If a boy or a girl is absent for more than two nights their parents have to pay the fine to the *Ghotul*. The *chelik* and the *motiári* are partners while dancing, two by two in a large circle as the dance goes on. They share the same mat at night. But the discipline is strict. For the marriage they must await the word of the *Silledár*. Then they have to leave the *Ghotul*. If a girl becomes pregnant, she

[1] W. V. Grigson, *Lejá, or Love Song, of the Muriá of the Amábál Pargana of Bastar State*, New Verse, February March-1937, pp. 17—19.

must hold the hand of her boy before the whole house. He must confess and they must marry. The marriage in this case will not be a full ceremonial.

The interior has its own aboriginal dialects; the *Abujhmár*, or the Land of Obscurity—a mass of rugged hills is the home of the unspoiled, pure Máriá Gonds.

The Halbás are found in small colonies everywhere except the extreme south. They were the raja's garrison in the past; Halbi, their language, took the place of some of the aboriginal dialects. It may extend even to the Abujhmár Hills, the Godávari and the Lower Sáveri and the Lower Indrávati valleys.

The tribal unrest was the cause of the Muriá Rebellion in 1886 in the time of Raja Bhairam Deo. After the death of the Raja the State was managed by Government. In 1910, when Rudra Pratap Deo, Bhairam Deo's son, ruled over the State, once again the Muriás rebelled when even the Máriás and Parjás joined them. The Muriá-Máriá-Parjá Rebellion was suppressed subsequently. The voice of the tribal unrest, however, echoes in *The Weaver's Song*:

> *Kholo kholo*, flows the water.
> How much will you command the woman with the loose hair-knot?
> The *dhoti* with big borders must be woven closely,
> Not by feet, the people should be known by faces.
> Seen from the back he looks quite gorgeous,
> Hands clapped with handcuffs, feet bound with fetters.
> He is Kanhai Majhi.

The village-headman is called *Máihi* among the Muriás. Kanhai must have been a hardbitten headman. His image is fixed on the mind of every Muriá mother. The youths and maidens in the *Ghotul* talk of the past history. *The Weaver's Song* seems to add strength to the tribal unity in the land of the *Reelo*, the *Chait Parab* and the *Léjá*.

6

The Bhojpuri Birha

BIRHA means separation from the lover or the beloved, yet the *Birhá* in Bhojpuri is not necessarily a song of separation.

Bhojpuri folk-songs have a long oral tradition behind them. It may be assumed that the oldest songs, coming through the evolutionary process of unconscious and conscious selection and modification in their passage through the people's minds generation after generation, are more ancient than the earliest classical poetry of this country. Community singing kept the creative genius alive for centuries. New songs came into being extempore; many of them died, others survived and got into the oral tradition. They all make us familiar with the people's road through culture and history. They are, in broad outline, its musical autobiography. The *Birhá*, particularly, helps us to understand its development and *milieu*; it reveals the emotional levels. Solitude and vastness surround the *Birhá*—singer, and the horizon widens.

"My *Birhá* I won't leave here," an old cowherd told me; "it must travel with me. No matter if I go into Heaven or Hell after this life."

"Don't you sing the *Birhá*?" I once inquired of a peasant.

"I sing," he replied smilingly, "though I cannot sing the *Birhá* like the Ahir."

It is significant that the Ahir[1] in Bihar and the United Provinces is the uncrowned king of the *Birhá* songs. "His family having been connected for many generations with the sacred animal, the cow," as Eha says, "he enjoys a certain consciousness of moral respectivity, like a man whose uncles are deans or canons."[2] With almost equal delight he sings of his gentle and simple cow and his wild sweetheart. He would even sing of his thirsty goddess in the pastures, and would like to give her the milk of his cow. His accent is the pride of Bhojpuri.

"Bhojpuri is the practical language of an energetic race."[3] The old city of Bhojpur, after which it was named, is no more to be found, yet the two villages of the same name situated in Shahabad district in Bihar still carry on the time-old memory.[4]

[1] 'A very large and important Hindu caste, at least three-quarters of a million of them live in the Central Provinces alone. In most of our villages there is a family of Ahirs, whose duty it is to look after all the cows and milk them. For this service, every fifth day they are allowed to keep all the milk of the village for themselves. They regard Krishna as their special patron, as he was himself a cowherd. Their favourite festival is the Marhai, when they get drunk and perform very exciting dances that symbolize their adventures in the forest.'—Verrier Elwin, *Leaves from the Jungle*, p. 227.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 227.

[3] George A. Grierson: *The Linguistic Survey of India.*

[4] The Bhojpuri speaking region begins from Benares in the west and embraces Muzaffarpur in the east; the southern and northern boundaries being Jubbalpur and the Himalayan Lowland respectively. Thus it includes Shahabad, Saran, Champaran and the north-western part of Muzaffarpur in Bihar, and Benares, Ghazipur, Azamgarh, Balia, Jaunpur and some parts of Mirzapur in the eastern United Provinces. Mághi and Maithilí are Bhojpuri's sister-dialects in Bihar. The frontiers of Maithilí and Bhojpuri meet on the Gondak river. The flavour of Bhojpuri in Bihar, is markedly superior to the United Provinces Bhojpuri that lacks, somehow, the musical intonations of the former.

The Ahir speaks loudly and sings with the strength of his lungs. He walks freely in his pastures. His superstitions are deep-rooted and powerful. It is very seldom that he defies the authority of his gods. He laughs a double laughter. Even his gods seem to laugh with him, sharing his thought and wit.

In his favourite songs, the Ahir addresses his god and comrade in one breath. Every Ahir knows the old *Birhá* that depicts the birth of a real folk-song :

> The *Birhá* song we raise not like a crop, brother,
> Nor it ripens on the branch of a tree :
> The *Birhá* lives in the heart, O Rámá,
> Sing it while the heart is full.

The *Birhá* is really the song of the full heart. Its method is pictorial. The image may be life-like or it may be a figure seen in a dream. The Ahir youth, as he sings, seems to touch up the fading colours.

Years ago, Grierson explored the wealth of the Bhojpuri folk-songs and aptly observed : "Many of these are of considerable length...... These longer songs, however, are the property of the professional singers......If these longer songs can be compared to opera, the shorter ones can be equally well likened to the drawing-room piece......Every stout young fellow has a repertoire of them, out of which he sings whenever he has nothing better to do, whether alone, or in company. He has probably only one tune, to which he fits all his words , and as the tune wanders about through all keys, and generally has a *cadenza* of twenty or thirty notes every second or third syllable, it is difficult for the European, untrained to native tastes, to catch what he sings. This paucity of melodies has often struck me. In the country districts I never heard of a new tune being invented. There seems to be a certain stock of tunes

ready made, to which the words of every new song must be fitted. Thus every mill-song must be sung to the melody called *Játsár* and such songs are called *Játsárs*. So certain songs sung in the month of *Chait* are classed as *Ghátós*, and the class of songs sung in the rainy season is called *Kajrí*, which is the name of the air to which they are sung. Some castes have melodies peculiar to them. For instance only cowherds (*Ahirs* or *Goars*) sing the songs classed *Cháchars* and *Birhás*, which are sung to the tunes called *Cháchar* or *Birhá* respectively... ..

" The *Birhá* is essentially a wild flower...,.. Contrary to what might have been expected, it deals much oftener with the warrior god Ráma. than with the cowherd god Krishna...... This is the consequence of the singers' surroundings. Shahabad, the district in which they dwell, might almost be called a second Rajputana in its heroic legends and songs...... It is a country of fighting-men, and as such, Rama of Ayodhiá and not Krishna of Mathurá is the god of the land. The *Birhás* also deal with other deities, e.g., with the special incarnation of Durgá, which is the tutelary deity of the singers' village......

" Many are the *Birhás*, which describe the charms which adorn and the temptations which beset the pretty young village maidens, whose forms are developing from childhood into maidenhood......the girls are all wives, though their husbands have not taken them home. Hence we find the girls complaining of the non-arrival of their husbands, and a number of not very delicate jokes which the village elders (men and women) launch at a girl when she first becomes *apta viro*. Sometimes, too, we find the girl, half-pleased, half-angry, relating the attentions paid to her by some village-swain who met her as she walked through the forest. Again, we have songs referring to a woman's married life. She is

now living in her husband's house, and she hyperbolically describes the slimness of her form, as reminding him of the string by which he lowers his drinking vessel into the well. Or, perhaps, as often happens, the husband is away on service and sends his earnings home, which are not always put to legitimate uses.

"Even when away from home on service, the cowherd longs for his congenial occupations, and looks back to the happy days when he wandered free over the rich pastures on the Kaimur hills (the principal pasture land of Shahabad, they are to the south of the district and are a branch of the Vindhyá range). Or he looks contemptuously at the elaborate preparations of wrestlers and gymnasts, and tells how the young Ahir would only need to touch up his waist cloth, and could do just as much......each one is a miniature picture of some phase of village life......"[1]

The *Birhá* is sung with a deep sincerity and feeling. The music almost the same every time, yet every voice has its own colour. The stability of tune, however, may not be taken as a good quality. The theme may be any, it must follow the same music. In a more developed stage, of course, the music follows the words, and illustrates the very spirit of each song separately.

The *Birhá*, in spite of the conflict between the tune and the theme seems to maintain its appeal.

One may assume that the tune of the *Bírhá* is older than even the Bhojpuri language itself, or that it goes back to the prehistoric times.

While singing the *Birhá*, the singer feels life coursing through his veins from head to feet, and if he has a charming voice, can inspire his listeners. Only for the

[1] George A. Grierson: *Some Bhojpuri Folk-songs*, J. R. A. S., Vol. XVIII new series, p. 207.

unsophisticated Ahir can the original colour of the *Birha* be preserved. The flute, for instance, has existed for centuries :

> The bamboo-grove where I played with friends,
> O it never fades from my mind :
> A flute shall I make of a bamboo from the same forest,
> The *Birhá* shall I sing from door to door in the village.

The Gonds have a riddle about the bamboo : 'In his youth, he is well dressed; but when he is old, he goes naked.'[1] The Ahir, too, would think of the bamboo in the same terms. The bamboo-grove is another *Madhuban*, Forest of Honey-sweet Desire. The *Birhá*, accompanied by the flute, is the eternal soliloquy from the *Madhuban*.

The *Birhá* is not strictly regular. The second and the fourth line may rhyme or not ; and as regards the length of the lines, their elasticity makes up for the deficiency.

The *Semar*, or the silk-cotton tree, feels sad. It does not know what to do. The *Birhá*-singer knows its heart-felt pain :

> The *Semar* tree meditates :
> Why are my flowers red ?
> Why are not my flowers offered to the goddess and the god ?
> And why doesn't the gardener make garlands of them ?

The *Semar*, with its scarlet flowers, is so very beautiful to look at. Yet the flowers of the *Semar* have no scent. Any worthless thing may be compared to the *Semar* flowers, though the Gond riddle about the *Semar* does not seem to underrate its flowers : 'A rough pole covered with red jewels.'[2] It is obvious that the Ahir, in a desperate mood, meditates like the sad *Semar* tree. And

[1] Verrier Elwin : *Songs of the Forest*, p. 148.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 164.

who knows if even some Ahir, like the Gond, becomes the ghost of this tree: 'It is well not to build a house too near a *Semar*-tree, for here a *ráksha* may be hiding, that discomforting ghost of a man who has died without tasting the delights of love. A fire consumes him, and at night he steals out of his prison to the house of some village maid, and crops her virgin flower.'[1]

The lotus, on the contrary, is quite fortunate:

The Lotus plant calls upon Ráma:
I feel so solitary here in the pond!
Its leaves are picked up and they go to the dining-room.
The lotus itself is offered to Siva.

The lotus is treated as sacred. It is a thing of beauty too; the lotus-eyed damsel has been proverbial in India. The time-honoured lotus must go to the temple. Siva likes it. The lotus leaves make good plates; a gift of nature. One of the great ideals is to follow the example of the lotus.

Siva alone would not do. The *Dihvar*, or the tutelary village-god, is important:

Village, O village! cries out the village-god,
The village is fast asleep:
Riding on your womb I came, O village,
O you don't reply to my first call!

Every village has its own tutelary god. 'He is said often to be heard calling out over the fields at night, especially when the worshippers are lax in their attention to him.'[2] With a new village, a new village-god was automatically created. This *Birhá*, cooled artistically in the mould into which the popular diffusion of many generations poured it, expresses the driving force of

[1] *Ibid*, p. 37.
[2] George A. Grierson, *Some Bhojpuri Folk-songs*, J. R. A. S. Vol. XVIII, p. 207.

mythology. The village-god, even more authoritative than the landlord, would disturb the fatigued countrymen while they are asleep at dead of night.

In the pasture lands, the goddess tries to exploit the Ahir by making him feel that she should be given some milk; and the Ahir takes his courage in both hands to evade her oft-repeated demand as if she were only a clever countrywoman who lives by her wits:

Our goddess feels hungry, brother,
She asks for milk to drink:
Shall I milk the banyan or the *Barohi* tree?
My *Bainá* cow has gone a long way off.

Yet in another *Birhá* the Ahir, perhaps overtaken by the fear of the wrath of the goddess, may make a promise of offering her the milk of his cow:

Goddess, O goddess, I cry out, O goddess Sárdá!
The goddess hovers above in the sky:
A whole river of milk shall I give you, O goddess,
O! do come down from the sky.

Ráma, Laksmana and Sítá, the chief characters of the Rámáyana, have their faint images in the *Birhás*:

Ráma I call to mind, as I sing, Brother Lakshmana
I call to mind,
The whole world I call to mind, as I sing:
My mother and father I call to mind, as I sing,
O! they brought me up since childhood days.

Ráma and Lakshmana both left for the forest,
And Sítá accompanied them.
Ráma and Lakshmana felt thirsty,
Sítá gave them nectar mixed with water.

The Ahir may go on with the tale. His own suffering, if any, would come to his mind; all the pathos, woven into the woof of Rámáyana, looks like his own. Everywhere in India, the song of Ráma's exile echoes

and re-echoes.[1]

The *Birhá* is a miniature picture. It is not always a short-lived song, yet when it ceases to live, from its ashes, phœnix-like, it rises again with renewed vitality to live through another cycle. The image gets astonishingly sharp and absolutely clear—more sharp and clear than before in every way. Every image is at once a clue to the Ahir's interests. It seems to define love, its significance, its emotional overtone.

The Ahir girl, who has left her childhood much behind, walks like a forest-princess:

In one forest an ant wanders,
In one forest a cow wanders,
In one forest wanders the daughter of the Ahir mother
With bells fastened on her breasts.

The tinkling sound of the young girl's bells wakes answering music in the heart of the Ahir, and he makes a living forest poetry.

Who knows if the Ahir virgin, who is supposed to be the mother of the chief god of the Gonds, walked in the forest with bells fastened on both her breasts? Burra Deo, the Gond god, 'springs, they say, from a child born of an illicit union between a Gond and an Ahir girl. The father murdered the child by strangling it, and its spirit then began to haunt first the man and his family and then all the people of the neighbourhood. It could only be quieted by a promise that the Gonds would make it the great god of their tribe and worship

[1] "In Bengal the *Kathakas* and the ballad-singers still ply their calling as they used to do, and the story of Sitá and her exiled lord is still being told and retold...... Sitá, it may be explained, is almost the type-figure of the Hindu wife; but she is also a folk-tale princess 'whose tender feet covered with *altá* are wounded by thorns,' whose eyes shed bitter tears......" Earnest Rhys, *Rabindranath Tagore*: A Biographical Study, p. 48.

it for ever.'[1]

The *Birhá* catches the voice of the Ahir girl. It is love that has ever poured drops of honey into the hard life of man :

The east wind blows and I just yawned.
While standing, my body is filled with lassitude :
Who is the dandy whose gaze fell upon me ?
The home and the forest, O neither of them would me please.

The *Birhá* at its best is a symbolic document. The lyrical threads are woven into a sort of primitive symbolism. Such songs are less numerous than one might expect :

I was slim, and I became slimmer still,
I became a string for the vessel to draw water from the well :
I offered my lord sweet water to drink
Without the vessel, without the string.

Some of these songs refer to tattooing. The tattoo marks, unlike the ornaments, it is believed, accompany a woman beyond the cremation ground. The tattooer should be an artist, herself a woman she should understand the taste of the young girl :

On her fair arms, the fair bride gets herself tattooed,
As the needle pierces her tender heart she says :
Tattoo such a pattern, O tattooer,
As the dyer dyes my bridal *sári*.

Atmosphere and character are handled with speed and terseness. Each word is fully charged.

The fair bride started alone from Bagsar
With pearls she adorned the parting of her hair :
O, who is this young man whose gaze fell upon me ?
All of a sudden my pearls dropped down !

The *Birhá* may have a double meaning :

For juice I sent the bee, O friend,
But it brought me a little juice ;

[1] Verrier Elwins, *Songs of the Forest*, p. 16.

With how many girls shall I share
O, the whole village is dear to me?

Here *ras*, in the original, means both love and juice. *Bhanvarvá* or *bhanvar*, in Sanskrit *bhramara*, is the bumble-bee mad after flowers, going from one flower to another to enjoy their fragrance: it is the lover. The girl, somehow, means that the love she has procured, is enough only for herself and she cannot afford to share it even with the dearest maiden.

Mangri symbolizes the untamed Ahir belle:

Your legs and my legs are of the same length, O Mangri,
Why not come with me to the gram field?
I shall give you plenty of green gram to fill your belly,
I shall sing the unheard *Birhá*.

Mangri's *Song of the Gram Field* has its own appeal

The gram, when it is green, I eat and fill my stomach,
The gram, cooked as *Dál*, I eat.
The gram, used in sweetmeat prepared with *ghee*, I eat,
My cheeks, plump and fair, are indebted to the gram.

There must be songs in praise of the wheat. A Bhojpuri proverb says: *Avar anna kháilen, na gehun ganthiávle*, *i.e.*, other corn is for food, but wheat is to be treasured in a bundle. The very idea that you have wheat gives you strength.

The new ploughman sings his own *Birhá*:

When young I grazed the cows,
The milk of the *bakenvá* cow I drank;
Since father handed over to me the handle of the plough
No more can I drink the *bakenvá's* milk.

The *bakenvá*, in Hindi *baken* or *bakená*, is a cow that

calved some nine or ten months ago; her milk is thicker and more sweet.

Away from home and his congenial life, the Ahir yearns to go back:

No more looking after the cows,
No more bathing in the Ganges,
No more friends' company under the *neem* tree:
These three things God Almighty took away from me.

The *Birhá*, when sung with the proper force, has its direct appeal:

The *Birhá* I sing roaring like a tiger,
As though the clouds thunder;
Listening to it the fair bride rushes out
Suddenly the words of the *Birhá* bend down.

Sometime the *Birhá*-singer reflects upon the social and economic life of the people:

In his cowshed sings the Ahir's son,
The fair bride inside, her house, discovers the voice:
Where does a cow have mother's home, O friend,
And where do the tenant farmers have a motherland?

The sad bride compares herself to a cage-bird:

All the sparrows will fly away
Each in its own time:
I, a sinner, confined in a cage,
In deep sorrow I die.

But the flirt is happy:

The fair bride sits cleaning her saucepan
She plays rhythmically on a small brass vessel and thinks:
Money my husband gets as pay,
So much I spend on chewing betels alone.

The flirt feels jealous of her husband's sister—her newly matured *nanad*:

My accursed sister-in-law won't listen to me,
Leaning over the yard she stands:
She lets the mosquitoes bite her flower-like breasts,
She would not lend them to me, even if I make bold to ask.

Or:

To such a sister-in-law even death won't come
Nor does she leave for her father-in-law's;
Just on the road she puts her bed,
My sweetheart comes and goes away.

The point is that the newly-matured sister-in-law has become an unwanted rival.

In some of these songs we find a sort of comparison between the images in the first and the second half of the *Birhá*:

On the branch of the mango, a bunch of mangoes looks lovely,
In the forest, the *palās* trees are blossoming:
In the lap of the fair bride, the child looks lovely
As though the moon appeared on the sky.

Or:

In the tank, the lotus flowers look lovely
In the field, the wheat-ears:
In the royal court, the Raja's turban looks lovely
In the yard, the *Kám dhenu* cow-like bride.

Or:

On the branch of the mango, the *koel* sings,
In the forest the peacock dances:
On the river bank I sing my *Birhá*,
It pierces the heart.

The parallels are not always reasoned, well-balanced

allegories. Yet a note of sincerity runs through the images, drawn from Nature and human life. This double parallelism sometime harbours the economic problems of village-life :

All would turn graziers of buffaloes and cows,
If there were only pastures enough :
All would like to have wives and children,
If there were money enough to spend in the house.

The Birhá-singer, who has inherited the experience of his forefathers, is more and more conscious of the increasing population :

The she-tortoise gives birth to a son, O Rám !
The Ganges gives birth to a bank of sand :
Small, small girls have produced daughters and sons,
O why doesn't a thunderbolt fall on their wombs !

The earliest *Birhás* are self-expressions of wish-fulfilment ; they breathe the air of the forest. The *Birhá*, to use the words of one of the earliest *Birhás*, never ripened like a fruit on the tree, was never cultivated like a crop in the field ; it simply lived in the heart of the Ahir. It drank the cow's milk, sucked the forest-honey, one after the other. The Ahir bride walked through the forest bedecking the parting of her hair with pearls. The village-god did not drop the reins of the village even at dead of night. The goddess ever wanted milk from the Ahir.

Now the Ahir finds himself in a changed world. Exploitation becomes rapid. Harvests deceive. The landlord demands his share. The *Birhá* today must grow in the field, must ripen like a fruit on the tree. It must suck now even the bitter sap of life. New society, new

Birhá. It must tell the story of the Ahir's struggle for bread, the story of the real world of necessity.

Yes, the railway-line has reached the forest:

Since the railway train shot out,
Forests and hills are cut down ;
Money I had, I gave to my legs
To my stomach I gave the bones of my back.

The money was spent on the railway ticket to save the legs from exertion: penniless, the Ahir ate nothing, and his stomach, shrinking and shrinking, touched his backbone.

The Ahir leaves his village now for employment in the town. His wife does not agree :

At your feet I fall, my darling !
Do not go to the town :
Eat the wheat-bread with the cooked mustard leaves.
Pass your days in the village.

But the wheat-bread is a dream for many Ahir families:

Beholding big, big bins, don't be mistaken, Nirahuá
Even the she-rat fasts here :
Our children lick up the *lapsi*
We sell the *Mahuá* to make a living.

The *lapsi* is more or less the staple food of the poor. The coarser part of the wheat flour is first soaked in water; after some time it is filtered and the water is heated. As it reaches the bubbling point some *gur* is mixed. When cold, it turns solid. The *Mahuá*[1] flowers are dried and taken as food; they are also used to distil

[1] *Basia Latifolia.*

country liquor. The *Mahuá* fruit makes a good food, and its seeds yield an oil used for cooking.

The Ahir gets no inspiration for a new song:

> Because of the killing hunger I've lost my *Birhá* song,
> I've lost too my *Kajri* songs, my *Kabir* songs;
> As I look at the fair bride's rising breast,
> Now no more longing I feel.

The foundation of old rural economy all shaken, the Ahir leads a hungrily idle life. No bread, no *Birhá*.

Gandhi is replacing the tutelary village-god. Unlike the old gods, he is a fighter for the people's cause. The challenging voice of the Ahir poet has all the unquiet hungry atmosphere behind it:

> In Gandhi's fight, you won't win, O Englishman,
> Whatsoever measures you may take:
> Good, good luxuries you had in this land,
> Now the bungalows will be sold.

The future of the Bhojpuri Birhá is not dark. The economically strong Ahir will sing more and more about the outer reality, though the inner realities of life, as ancient as his forests and plough-land, will endure with all their eternal pulse and simplicity.

It is significant again that Bhojpuri is the mother-tongue of ten million people. Bhojpuri-speaking region will develop on the lines of republics in Soviet Russia when India has attained her independence. The Bhojpuri *Birhá* will certainly appraise the national republic and the new life movement.

A Wandering Minstrel

HALF a century old, not a year more. His memory is flooded with colours like the autumn grass. His mind retains its glow. Twisting into a bow, under his moustaches, his lips ever catch a running smile. Wrinkles on his forehead have followed their own patterns : they all mean experience.

He is a villager, first, last and always. He is like the blowing wind, fresh and invigorating. With his eyes bowed down over the strings of his *sárangi*, he sings as he goes from village to village. Children gather round him. Young girls, shy brides and mothers listen to him with admiration. For his songs he gets corn or a small coin.

I know him since my childhood days. He has no inferiority complex, though he looks no more than a beggar. He enjoys the appreciation of his listeners. He does not envy. "What does it matter if I have no fields and money," he says, "my songs are my harvest."

His forehead is firm, his eyes calm with the resignation of old age. He has felt all the pulses of life. Over the people's sorrows he weeps : over his own joys, he may not smile. "Man's life is brief," he says, "brief its music, its warp and woof." The challenging attitude is no good in his eyes.

A deep sense of friendship, that he must have sucked with his mother's milk, has brightened his outlook. Yet

he cannot sign his name. An illiterate.

He walks slowly, his hand stroking his beard. His big, hairy hands, holding his *sárangi*. His eyes that will at once guess your opinion of him.

"What wind has brought you back ?" he asks me.

"Your songs ever pull me back, Baba Sundar !" I tell him, and he bursts with laughter.

Rumour is rife that he was born in a *Ját* house, and if a notorious minstrel had not kidnapped him in his childhood days he would have turned into a full-blooded peasant. He smiles at this hearsay. He has no memory of his mother. "My father was a wandering minstrel" he says with conviction, "he died when I was fifteen. He gave me his art." He cannot name his birth place. A full gypsy. Roads are dear to him. Winds are his companions.

The old story of the princess, who went about begging for a husband and won over a wandering minstrel at last, provokes an interesting thought. Was that minstrel of the folk-tale a better artist than this minstrel of ours ? Or was he more ecstatic and sportive ?

"Ever since I got a *sárangi* I thought it was my bride," he tells me. As he plays on it, it laughs and cries with him. It becomes almost human, as if it were his own heart; as the Russian folk singer said of his *domrá*: "When I touched the instrument it seemed to me that it was not *domrá* but my young heart that beat against my fingers"; or as someone said of a Gypsy fiddler of Hungary: "He plays the fiddle as one breathes: the instrument seems to become part of his organism: the strings are a natural prolongation of his nervous system."

His songs are long memories and essential passions.

The joyous, full-flowing love-songs centring round the story of the immortal lovers, Heer and Ránjhá, he sings with great warmth. Every girl among his listeners perhaps yearns to become another Heer, and every bride is inspired to recognize her husband as her Ránjáh. He sings the ballad of Raja Gopi Chand who left his throne in search of truth. Every mother yearns for her son, going out for employment, as if he had gone away like another Gopi Chand. He sings of Pooran Bhagat, too—another prince who walked on God's path. He cries actually as he continues the song-story of Pooran Bhagat. He looks another follower of the great path.

He a folk singer; I, a collector of folk-songs. Sitting by his side and listening to him, I at once visualize Walter Starkie listening to his Gypsy blood-brother's ancient song and thus making up his mind to travel among the Gypsies in their own garb to know their life and lore, the song haunting him in his lecture room and at home:

> "What care I for goose-feather bed,
> With the sheet turned down so bravely, O!
> For to-night I shall sleep in a cold open field
> Along with the raggle-taggle Gypsies, O!"

Yet the contrast is obvious. This old minstrel wanders alone: he never married. I wander with my wife and daughter. Walter Starkie, though married, goes about with a fiddle across Spain, as he writes in his *Spanish Raggle-Taggle*, mentioning his wife: "As day by day she weaves and unweaves Penelope's web awaiting my return, she will pray that long nights and days of toiling over the plateau lands of Castile living on raw ham and garlic will change my squat uncourtly figure

into a bronzed image of the Apollo Belvedere. Sweet illusion of the female mind! What should we do if our wives ever give up the hope of their dreams? So, work away, seamstress! Let out the girth three inches: I'll not feel ashmed. Nay I'll console myself with the thought that the best minstrels and story-tellers were gifted with a pleasant rotundity of mind and body: they were able to take the rough with the smooth and relish the swift changes of fortune."

He believes the legend. He is sure that after his death Guru Nanak came back on earth to bring the seeds of the mustard and maize, for he could not live in Heaven without the *sarsonság* and the maize bread! Now even the gods are fond of this food, he tells me, as if it were the latest news from Heaven.

"Dreams ever give me a new force," he says, "my life is the milky way." And does not the milky way look like life's well-trodden track?

I mark him retouching the old words and tunes here and there. He is an artist in his own right. He has specialized. It has always been my memorable experience to hear him singing.

"Hallo Baba Sundar!"

He smiles at once, as I raise my folded hands in reverence. He seems to say in the words of Wal Whitman: "My tongue, every atom of my blood, formed from this soil; born here of parents the same and their parents the same." And his *sárangi* speaks in almost human voice as he sings:

What flower is the best, brother,
What flower the best?

O yes, you know the cotton flower,
Brother, it covers the naked limb.

What footmark is the best, brother,
What footmark the best ?

O yes, you know the mark of the water,
Brother, it makes the earth fertile.

What colour is the best, brother,
What colour the best ?

O yes, you know the colour of the earth,
Brother, it gives us bread.

What voice is the best, brother,
What voice the best ?

O yes, you know the voice of the millstone,
Brother, it turns the wheat into flour.

What beak is the best, brother,
What beak the best ?

O yes, you know the beak of the ploughshare,
Brother, it prepares the earth for seed.

What instrument is the best, brother,
What instrument the best ?

O yes, you know it is the *sárangi*,
Brother, the comrade of the minstrel.

He has a song for every mood. Halting a little to find some responsive chord, he tries to lend a new colour to the old melody. Herein lies his greatness. The stars move orderly in their courses, not so his songs. Every time a different note.

If there is but one attentive soul he can sing. Every time he is a new man, alive, alert, enthusiastic. His melodies are so infectious and reminiscent; the listeners stand enchanted. There is a pause. The scene changes. The bow chases the past glory of the Punjab. Now gay and intoxicating, now the half sobs catching at his voice.

The effect of his songs depends largely on his method of delivery. Listening to him I feel the national spirit never dies. In some of his songs lies the bright promise of tomorrow.

He rules the scene. His feet are deep in the soil like a tree, yet he moves. My village birthplace will always welcome him.

Generations of peoples have listened to the wandering minstrel all the world over. When he is wiped out in the threatening machine age, the mother-heart of India, the village, will weep in deep sorrow over this great tragedy.

8

The Mother of Peacocks

THE CRIMSON glow of the sky overhead and the calm waters of the Irrawaddy at my feet—they keep me lost in thoughts. Brooding over them, I lie down prostrate on the sand motionless. This sight of sights, the bank of the Irrawaddy engrosses me.

Down through the centuries, the Irrawaddy has been flowing exactly like this. She has given birth to Burma. She knows the history of the Burmese people—as if she were saying : "It is I who have taught them how to laugh." She is the guardian of the people's happiness : they are very happy. I read somewhere—I do not remember where—that we have in us happiness and sorrow, side by side. None of us can separate them. We cannot say how we change from a gay mood to a sad one. But the people of Burma have, however, instinctively I should think, known how to separate the one from the other. For look wherever you please, you meet the same happy beaming faces. I have travelled far and wide and have rubbed shoulders with people of many a land. But if at all I have seen a people so happy, my memory fails me. Why are they so happy ?

Like the sails I stretch out my arms. I dance. I fall down prostrate on the sands, which have been here for centuries. Yes, for centuries, and for centuries the

Irrawaddy has given peace to the human mind. These surroundings, somehow, appeal to me. Life should be like this, like a stream, like the Irrawaddy, wide and free.

I wished to sail from Rangoon to Mandalay on the waters of the Irrawaddy. It is only seven days' journey, but I took the train and saw the Irrawaddy for the first time at Mandalay.

Kaka Kalekar's words ring in my ears : " Should we call it Irrawaddy or Airawati. Perhaps it has got this name from *Irá*, the grass, or perhaps the elephant feeding on *Irá* was called *Airáwati*, or perhaps, again, some Buddhist monk, impressed by the sauntering movement, like that of the god Indra's Airáwat elephant, said to himself : 'We shall call it *Airáwati*. Indeed, if the Irrawaddy had been in India, the Sanskrit poets would have brought into being a literary stream, as wide and as long as the Irrawaddy itself........."

Every river starts from the mountains, travels down the valleys and in the plains, flowing fast to the sea. The Irrawaddy, too, comes from the mountains.

"How far away is the Irrawaddy's source ?"

"About 700 miles."

"You mean it is 1300 miles long ?"

"Yes."

When the Irrawaddy left the lap of the mountains, it little knew that it would further be reinforced by the waters of Mali Hka and N'Mai Hka which would push it ahead on a long journey, 1300 miles long. Indeed, no river cares to find how far it has to go. It simply starts. Such, then, is life.

Distant refrains fall into my ears—as if the Irrawaddy said : "Where else could you find songs such as

these ?" She is right. Where is the hurry ? I sit down again.

Good-bye, Irrawaddy ! Tomorrow at the same time I will return.

The Irrawaddy has left its impressions on my mind. But have I, in any way, influenced the Irrawaddy ? I walk away slowly. My host will be waiting. Irrawaddy is silent. And what could she say ?

II

Dawn on the river enchants me. Now Sadanand also accompanies me to the Irrawaddy. Like myself, he, too, is a bird of passage...

The Irrawaddy hums.

"Have your say, Irrawaddy."

Sadanand says : "The Arakan and Pegu Yoma mountains are the age-old sentinels of the Irrawaddy."

"All mountains", I say, "are expressions of the personality of mother Earth. Arakan and Pegu Yoma, too. Rabindranath Tagore has said somewhere : 'The river with its song runs fast, overcoming all obstacles. Yet the mountain stands still, lost in the memory of the river and its love flows with the rive,......The Arakan and Pegu Yoma, I should think, will ever be standing like this, lost in their love for the Irrawaddy."

"What is the first stage, going downstream to Rangoon ?"

"Amarapura."

"And the next ?"

"Ava."

Both Amarapura and Ava are towns with a history. With the Myingyan port further beyond, this valley has

been a scene of battles in days gone by. A few miles beyond is the Pakokku town where the Chindwin meets the Irrawaddy. Like a poor woman, the Chindwin coming down from the Shan States, sacrifices its chastity. The Irrawaddy plays the rank capitalist. Next comes Pegan, an old town, its history guarded by over thousands of ruined pagodas. The steamer now anchors at Nyaunghla, near which are the oil wells, exploited by the British and American capitalists, who have made mountains of gold out of them. Further on, the steamer passes through calm lands. Sky-cleaving mountains stand like thoughtful and silent guardians. The air is steeped in meditation. Further on, the steamer reaches Thayetmyo, Prome and Myanaung. Travelling still further, one finds the Irrawaddy branching out into many mouths and ultimately it merges itself into the sea.

Many a time have I wrangled with Sadanand. For it was because of him that I came here by rail. In no circumstances am I prepared to put up with another rail journey. Not that our journey was unenjoyable. We reached here halting on the way at almost every station, big or small, for a couple of days. We were lucky, for the chain of introductory letters remained unbroken. At Rangoon we got a letter for the very next station where, when our host excelled himself in hospitality, I concluded that we must have been praised much more than we deserved. And this hospitality we met with everywhere.

Sadanand is a *sanyási*. I respect him greatly. At times, I ask myself why he became a *sanyási*. He was born in a riverside village in Eastern Bengal, with which his childhood was linked, he says, as my life is now

linked with the Irrawaddy. When wander-lust of a sort arose, he left his home and set out. How did he become a *sanyási* ? To seek truth ? No.

"To explore a river's birth-place is by no means less important."

"You are right."

"How many days' journey is it to Bhamo ?"

"Three days."

The Irrawaddy now narrows its banks lined with dense teak forests. Beyond, the mountains raise their heads. Tagore has written somewhere : 'Trees are the unsatisfied desires of the earth : they stand on their toes and look up to the sky.' Does this apply to the teak trees of this country ? But they are felled, some earlier, some later, with none to sympathise with them or share their sorrow. Next to Mandalay comes Mingun and then Thabeikyin, well known for ruby mines up in the mountains. Here the Burmese guide would point out to a magnificent mountain—the Shwe Daung U, or the Golden Peacock. Further beyond is Mogok. Then Bhamo, whence the steamer goes up-stream but only during the rains and that too only as far as Myitkyina. One can take a native *sampan* boat, too, to travel from Bhamo to Myitkyina although the current here is strong and the journey up-stream far from easy. Near Myitkyina, where motor transport can be had, the Mali Hka and N'Mai Hka meet the Irrawaddy whose source is not far away.

The sound of the steamer making its way through the water is audible. I feel like setting out for the source of the Irrawaddy, but Sadanand does not agree.

The steamer whistles.

"Come on, Swamiji," I say, "let us go in for tickets."

"Not today."

This constant 'not today' annoys me. I am angry. I know he has not got the fare. I, too, have money which can hardly buy me one ticket. But it is enough to get us two tickets for some station on the way. Oh! if only we could start. What then turns up can be seen. The whistle of the steamer makes me restless. Without Sadanand's assent I cannot proceed. And this he knows.

"A *sanyási* can travel without a ticket."

"I am not that sort."

Money is to travel what steam is to an engine. There are thousands of *sanyásis* whose aim in life is to beg but Sadanand is different. He is a worker-cum-*sanyási*. He would deliver a lecture and settle his wages in advance. There are institutions which turn their back when it comes to payment. Again, sometimes when he is in need of money institutions do not agree to have his lectures. I am no different. I had sent an article to a Calcutta magazine, but I have not yet received the honorarium. I harbour doubts that it may not have been rejected. Nevertheless they should have informed me. I hope that the money order is delivered to-morrow.

Even Sadanand attaches little importance to his poor finances.

I reflect: the boatman on the Irrawaddy leads a happier life than the worker-cum-*sanyási*, or a gypsy writer like me. By her humming, Irrawaddy supports my contention.

Every man has his place; every man has a part to play. But why should life cheat one at the cost of another? Why this gulf between the life of the rich

and the life of the poor—a qualf that is ever widening? When will this order change? Sadanand smiles. Perhaps his far-seeing eyes glimpse the coming age as it approaches. He looks around him. Big question marks come to his mind. Perhaps he himself knows the answers.

Irrawaddy has hailed every new age. She has seen floods. It will soon be the turn of society to experience a flood. Its conservatism must go. It must be swept away from its roots. Waste and refuse will be washed away. Only then, human tears will not fall into the waters of the Irrawaddy.

III

In the increasing shadows of the evening, when life withdraws itself in thickening darkness, the boat songs leave a lasting impression upon our minds. Like the sails Sadanand, too, stretches out his arms and runs along the bank. And then he falls and lies prostrate on the sand.

In the ancient books a *sanyási* is instructed not to stay long in one place. Sadanand, however, is not bound by these restrictions. Why these restrictions after all?

The steamer whistles.

"Let us go and buy tickets, Swámiji. We have received money, too."

"Where is the hurry?"

"A *sanyási* should not be attached to one place."

"I am not that sort."

To be honest, I am myself attached to the Irrawaddy. How peace-giving this bank is! I feel like passing all my afternoons here.

Someone sings :

Won't you stop ?
Won't you listen to us ?
We are the waves of the Irrawaddy.

The dusk has descended. Had it been daylight I could have seen the boatman's face, and seen how the language of the waves of the Irrawaddy moved him.

Rain-clouds will soon pour down.
The mid-stream we have yet to cross.

I remember a folk-dance when the girls of the country, by the movement of their arms, imitated the rowing of a boat. There was fear on their faces. The boats were caught in the whirlpool and overhead came the rain.

The waves of music travel ahead to some unknown place :

Like the waves of the Irrawaddy,
My sweetheart is free.

For ages woman in Burma has been independent. Man has not robbed her of liberty and happiness. Usually faithful to her husband, if she finds that the husband is not after her heart, she declares before the village assembly that she is not bound to be his wife any longer. She is free to marry any person again. She remains the mistress of the property left by her father.

I have heard many a song by many a boatman. But there are some which I can never forget.

I

Irrawaddy, O my Irrawaddy,
O my dearest Irrawaddy,
All other rivers are dear,
But the dearest one is the Irrawaddy.

II

Fair virgins dance and sway,
Now fast, now slow.
Where did you pick up this dance,
Tell, tell, daughters of the Irrawaddy ?
We, the peacocks, you, peahens.
The peacocks will be killed, and you'll weep.
Did you pick up your dance on this turn of the river
Or on that mountain
Whence flows down the Irrawaddy ?
Where did you pick up this dance,
Tell, tell, daughters of the Irrawaddy ?

III

Our tears have been mingling with the waters of the Irrawaddy, ye brothers.
How dirty looks the Irrawaddy !
And when poverty strangles us,
The Irrawaddy will flow on as it does today.

IV

Flow on, Mother Irrawaddy, flow on.
Now fast, now slow :
Why are you silent, why are you sad, Irrawaddy ?
Gladly go on drinking our tears.
Ever, ever your sons we are.
Ever, ever our mother you are.
Flow on, Mother Irrawaddy, flow on.
Now fast, now slow.

V

Look at the breaking chains, ye virgins.
Look at the opening eyes of the Buddha, ye virgins.
Look at the waves of the Irrawaddy, ye virgins.

VI

Ask the Buddha where he did spend the moonlit nights :
Moonlit nights : Buddha's nights.
On the waters of the Irrawaddy Buddha spent the moonlit nights,

In the company of the peacocks Buddha spent his moonlit nights,
Moonlit nights : Buddha's nights.

VII

Buddha will keep awake, keep awake,
As all the forests, mountains and rivers keep awake,
As the gusts of seasonal winds keep awake,
As the sons of peacocks keep awake.
Buddha will keep awake keep awake.

Buddha will keep awake, keep awake.
As the waves of the Irrawaddy keep awake,
As the mother's lullabies keep awake,
As the hues of flowers keep awake,
Buddha will keep awake, keep awake.

VIII

To a slow, slow rhythm the peacocks dance, the peacocks dance.
O why so much do the peacocks dance ?
Mother of peacocks, speak awhile.
One word from your lips speak awhile.
Good looks all are for the peacocks, for the peacocks,
All love, too, is for the peacocks.
Mother of peacock, speak awhile.
One word from your lips, speak awhile.
Sunshine all is for the peacocks, for the peacocks.
All shade, too, is for the peacocks.
Mother of peacocks, speak awhile.
One word from your lips, speak awhile.
All the bells are for the peacocks, for the peacocks,
The musical instruments all, too, are for the peacocks.
Mother of peacocks, speak awhile.
One word from your lips, speak awhile.
All their tears the peacocks went on drinking, the peacocks went on drinking.
With heavy hearts the peacocks went on dancing.
Mother of peacocks, speak awhile,
One word from your lips speak awhile.

IX

Down the deep waters the fish sleeps,
Alas, she will be killed today,
And Irrawaddy will feel sad over her death.
Is your sleep so dreamless, O fish ?
Don't you really know your fate ?
Your eyes are blind, your ears deaf, your mouth dumb,
Your fate you can't escape, O fish,

X

Love passes like a boat, Irrawaddy,
Love won't stay, nor will youth and beauty,
Irrawaddy, your long course is a melody,
Passing through the ivory flute.

XI

Do not measure time, my love,
Time is no more cruel,
Sit down by me,
The Irrawaddy knows us, my love.

XII

O new sunrise, you always bring,
New life to the Irrawaddy ;
Lot of gold and lot of joy,
Lot of song and laughter,
O you always lell the newly married bride—
Bride, you'll soon be a mother—
The mother of a prince of a princess,
O new sunrise, you always bring,
New life to the Irrawaddy.

XIII

O long-treasured kiss, you are sweet,
Sweet like the song of the Irrawaddy ;
Love is the mother of gods,
Love is the mother of men,
They love, and lo! the stars smile,
They love, and lo! the sun rises anew ;

XIV

You must have met gods,
What do they say ?
Can they arrange for our freedom, Irrawaddy ?
Can they really make us happy ?
Yes, yes, the gods are not yet dead,
Yes, yes, they can help us.

Irrawaddy is humming. Her humming gives peace to my disturbed mind. It really widens my horizon.

My mind which has for several months past been a curio shop full of oddities—a sort of godown full of useless, higgledy-piggledy goods, is clear now. Sitting here new ideas come to my mind. My soul has become more and more receptive. The lightest impressions leave on it lasting pictures. Sadanand, too, seems to share my emotions.

Turning his round, earth-coloured head from side to side, sometimes he looks across the Irrawaddy and sometimes at my long, waving hair, where he gets the picture of a paddy field with the wind blowing through it.

" Get up, Swámiji, we must go home now."

" Where is the hurry ?"

Irrawaddy moves me very much. But have I influenced her in any way ? She has been flowing like this for centuries—this Mother of Peacocks !

MANDALAY,
August 1932.

9

Andhra Resurgent

South of the Vindhyas, Andhra has its own oral tradition of songs and ballads. Like the rest of India, Andhra village is the real bedrock of Andhra culture.

Andhra strives today for a separate linguistic province. Side by side with the political fight, work on the cultural front is carried on with redoubled zeal and hope. Telugu is a sweet language; Andhra must be proud of it. "Telugu is the Italian of the East," an Andhra poet quoting some European scholar, told me with gusto, "and the charm of Andhra folk-songs is due to the sweetness of Telugu."

Hundreds of old folk-songs have been collected; many more are still being collected. The Telugu periodicals take a keen interest; the *Bhárti*, *Graha Lakshmi*, *Andhra Bhumi* and *Andhra Patriká* have published some of the most genuine folk-songs. The educated classes now understand their value. Boys and girls in the schools and colleges will one day find folk-songs as a significant part of their education.

Nedunuri Gangadharam has collected over 4000 Andhra folk-songs. Some of these have appeared in the *Bhárti* and other Telugu journals; most of his collections are unpublished. He took me to Kontámuru village, three miles from Rajahmundry, his birth-place, where he

serves as the head-master of the Elementary School. His students, pretty little boys and girls, smiled at me as they sang old nursery-rhymes and game-songs. Gangadharam helped me with the texts of these songs; word by word, line by line, he explained through an interpretor.

The story of Gangadharam's song-pilgrimage greatly interested me. Every year, during the vacation, he goes about from village to village, district to district. He has no funds at his disposal and his own savings are quite meagre. It is the people's spirit of hospitality that comes to his rescue, though not everybody is equally good, and he remembers some bitter moments, too. He carries on with his journey, covered with dust and sweat, hunting songs of wild beauty. Every visit to a new village would enrich his song-bag and fill his heart with joy. Songs of one district he would sing to the peasants in the next district. They would sing their own songs, adding new riches to his collections.

To Gangadharam, I felt, his song-bag is more precious than his own self. After the day's work in the school, he would open his magic-bag. Many songs he has already learnt by heart; many more he is learning. Vacation comes and he is on the move, his nomad spirit urging him on. A genuine, silent worker, he does not run after publicity. When Andhra becomes a separate province, it must recognize the great work of Gangadharam and must put the required funds at his disposal to publish the ancient folk-songs that followed the people's march through the pages of cultural history.

Andhra folk-songs are irresistibly alive. Some of them surely go back to the prehistoric days. They have all grown with the people's life. There are contemporary folk-songs, too—all life-like, natural and unposed.

Some of the contemporary songs are just the work-shanties; the time-honoured rhythm is retained for pulling, pushing and other communal work and they help to maintain the spirit of joint labour.

The Andhra maidens even today join in chorus at evening when the bells of cows returning home from their pasture ring in their ears and the peace of dusk dwells in their souls:

> It is time now when the *Muggu* is made
> With a lotus design:
> It is time now when the jessamines
> And the *Jáji* flowers bloom.
> Time now when water is fetched
> In brass vessels:
> Time when the flowers of the *Karelá* creepers bloom,
> Time now when water is fetched in earthen vessels.
> Time now when the lamp is lit.
> Time now when the washerman brings clothes,
> Time now when the cows and calves return home.
> Time now when the brothers, younger and elder,
> Say their prayers:
> Time now when the daughters-in-law
> Put *kum-kum* on their foreheads.
> Time now when the daughters-in-law
> Besmear turmeric on their legs:
> Time now when the younger brothers' wives cut jokes:
> And when brothers give betels to each other.
> Time now when the brothers' wives throw saffron-water on each other,
> The virgin's face looks like a mirror, my own face looks like the lotus of the *Muggu*,
> Whosoever recites this song will have marital bliss for years sixty-and-three hundred.

The Lotus *Muggu* is drawn ritualistically before every house with some simple powder; it is called *Alpaná* in Bengal.

Poli, the Andhra harvest-god, is addressed very intimately :

Poli, O Poli, oh, why don't you come ?
Oh, why don't you come ?
Pray do come, O Poli !

Poli, O Poli, oh you have a concubine,
And so fond of the swing you are, O Poli !
Lo ! there stands a pair of *Bilva* trees—
Their flowers and leaves
Are all for the worship of Ganapti.
Poli, O Poli, oh, why don't you come ?
Oh, why don't you come ?
Pray do come, O Poli !

Our Poli, the *Yaggenná*, when he sits,
Looks like a *Kundi* mortar :
While he lies down, he looks like a pig :
And as he gets up, he is a deer !
Poli, O Poli, oh, why don't you come ?
Oh, why don't you come ?
Pray do come, O Poli !

The peasant feels the hand of Poli, the Andhra Harvest God, on the golden ears of the paddy. Sometimes Poli seems to merge in Ganapati,[1] the son of Siva. *Yaggenná* is the nickname of the harvest god. The peasant addresses him in terms beyond awe and formality ; he is his god, and he can cut jokes with him, bringing forth a bold note of satire, when he thinks that the

[1] In a paper on Ganapati, better known as Ganesh, read before the ninth All-India Oriental Conference at Trivandrum, Mr. Lachhmidhar Sastri maintained that Ganesh was originally a corn-god. For the possibility that early in his career he was "lord of the harvest," Mr. Sastri quotes Alice Getty (Ganesa, p. 2), who herself cites Gupte for the translation of *ekadanta* as "one tusk" or "ploughshare." Mr. Sastri goes on to say that the tusk may be the sickle with which the corn is reaped. *Proceedings and Transactions of the ninth All-India Oriental Conference*, Trivandrum, December, 1937. Published at Trivandrum, 1940.

god is getting fat eating too much of the harvest as he rushes forth to take the last sheaf for threshing.

Gauri Burst with Laughter could be the title of the following song :

In the time of *Uttrakárte* star, O bee!
In the period of *Dakshnayána* sun, O bee
Dakshika's wife, a laceer, O bee !
Gave birth to one hundred and one daughters, O bee !
And seven of her daughters are unmarried still, O bee !
Two of my daughters, O bee !
I gave in marriage to the god of dust, O bee !
Two more I gave to the god of air, O bee !
And still two more, O bee !
I gave in marriage to the god of fire, O bee !
And Gauri alone remains unmarried, O bee !
To whom shall I marry you, O Gauri, O bee !
O my little Gauri, O bee !
Shall I marry you in a Brahmin family, O Gauri, O bee ?
The baths the Brahmins take are simply terrible, O bee !
O they bathe at every step, O bee !
O we can't do so, O Gauri, O bee !
Shall I marry you in a *Komati* family, O Gauri, O bee ?
O the turmeric-pounding in a *Komati* house, O bee !
O we can't do it, O Gauri, O bee !
Shall I marry you in a *Kammá* family ?
O Gauri, O bee !
O my little Gauri, O bee !
O the great mass of paddy
To be measured and given to many a *Málá* coolie !
O we can't do it, O Gauri, O bee !
Shall I marry you to a *Janga* mendicant ?
And Siva is such a man, O Gauri, O bee !
O my little Gauri, O bee !
Soon as the word Janga was uttered, O bee !
Lo ! Gauri burst with laughter, O bee !

It belongs to a special branch of Andhra folk-songs, called *Tummedá Pátálu*, or Bee Songs. The bee is addressed again and again, as if it can understand the

human voice; the bee, however, is not expected to answer. Immersed in various pages of mythology and tradition, the Bee Songs are sung during the first two weeks of *Dasahrá* festival. The women and girls of the *Harijans* alone sing these songs, as they go from door to door; they receive at every door some rice, and even some pennies. Gauri, more known as Gaurammá, was married to Siva; she is treated, however, as an Andhra girl, she laughs sportively. The song rises to a high level of Andhra humour. Gauri is perhaps a *Harijan's* daughter; a Brahmin's son she won't marry, nor a *Komati* money-lender's son, and nor indeed a *Kammá* peasant's son.

Love-songs never stop. The *Song of Ranga* is very popular:

> Don't you feel a joyful throb, my love?
> Under the sweet, bright moon
> Didn't I pray you to come and sleep?
> Come on, charming Ranga!
> O didn't I pray you to come and sleep?
>
> O I've come across the hillocks,
> Many an ant-hill, a dense forest I left behind,
> O didn't I pass them all to reach this wilderness?
> Come on, charming Ranga!
> O didn't I pass them all to reach this wilderness?
>
> You've none else to call your own,
> Me, too, have none else to call my own:
> Let's go, a home we'll make on the river,
> Come on, charming Ranga!
> We'll swim across the waters if there comes a flood.
>
> Let our hearts couple together—
> Making a raft of jessamines
> We'll launch together, let's go—
> Come on, charming Ranga!
> We'll launch together, let's go!

My eyes, beautified with *Kájal*,
A pitcher between my hip and arm,
Didn't I fill it with tears alone ?
Come on, charming Ranga !
Didn't I fill my pitcher with tears alone ?

There where men are not to be seen,
Where gods are lost in mirth and play—
Tying our garments' ends like husband and wife, the holy *Sari Gangá* bath we'll take—
Come on, charming Ranga !
The holy *Sari Gangá* bath we'll take.

If you become the moon, my love,
I'll be the light of the moon,
How close ever I'll follow you.
Come on, charming Ranga !
How close ever I'll follow you.

Chal mohan Ranga is the text of the refrain—come on, charming Ranga ! Everywhere in Andhra this song of Ranga's sweetheart is sung again. Unnava Lakshmi Narayana, an Andhra man of letters, procured for me these original stanzas of the song; it is one of the genuinely poetic love-songs, as almost every poet of contemporary Andhra would say. In 1937, C. Pullayya brought it on the screen. Pushpavalli, an Andhra actress, acted as Ranga's sweetheart, with Vali Subbarao in the role of Ranga. Many variants of the original stanzas of the song, obviously less poetic, are sung side by side. Perhaps the eyes of every Andhra youth in the countryside turn toward the daughters of the soil as they pass carrying their pitchers ; and someone would like to see if his sweetheart too can fill her pitcher with her tears like Ranga's sweetheart.

The *Song* of the *Chandragiri Sáris* figures supreme:

Putting a ladder to the lemon tree
My hand as I stretched to pick up some fruit
A thorn pierced my breast, O my golden maternal uncle!

O do send me some Chandragiri saris
Between you and me, O what a strange remoteness befell;
Yon blue hills impede our way:

To the hill I went, the sheep was grazing,
O handsome youth, O my golden maternal uncle!
O do send me some Chandragiri saris.

The maternal uncle, *Mámá* in Telugu, figures in many Andhra love-songs as the sweetheart. Unlike the marriage-customs of the Hindus in Northern India, a boy can marry his sister's daughter. A young *Mámá* is expected to be a dandy; more so, when a niece, just a sweet sixteen, walks before his eyes. As obvious from the image of a grazing sheep, the heroine of the *Chandragiri*[1] *Saris* belongs to a shepherd family.

[1] "The picturesque little town of Chandragiri in the district of Chittoor lies at the foot of the sacred Tirupati hills seven miles south-west of Tirupati town. Its situation on the right bank of the Svarnamukhi in the centre of the valley commanding the Kullur and the Mamandur passes in the Eastern ghats, through which alone the road to the south lay in the past, made it one of the most important strategic posts either for defence or agressive operations. Its position amidst mountains with the Seshadri range, rising to a height of about 2,000 feet on the north, the Pattikonda hills on the south, with their narrow passes and precipitous height makes it appear as if it had been designed by nature as an ideal fort. The innumerable spring channels and the river Svarnamukhi helped by the rich alluvial soil brought down by the mountain slopes have rendered the valley one of the most fertile. That these natural advantages were recognized

The *Song of the Fisher Boy* must have robbed its way through centuries :

Me, a fisher boy, O babu !
Beat me not, abuse me not, O babu !
A small fishing-boat I row, O babu !
A net to be hurled I throw, O babu !
At Poolápilli Puntá was I born,
In the fair at Pedápoori was I brought up,
My father's name is Jalla Konku,
My mother's name is Mattagirsa.
My sister's name is Chedupariga,
My brother's name is Royyipeechu,
My wife's name is Yisukadondu,
My own name is Bommirayyi.
Me, a fisher boy, O babu !
Beat me not, abuse me not, O babu !
A small fishing-boat I row, O babu !
A net to be hurled I throw, O babu !

The fisher boy represents the voice of the oppressed classes ; the babu stands for those who have the upper hand.

and availed from very early times is amply testified by the existence of the fort which, with the *mahal* it encloses, is the sole architectural legacy of the past ages to us. This circumstance and close association with the renowned shrine of Sri Venktesvara have always contributed to its history in the past. According to a local chronicle, a visit to the shrine and a subsequent desire to be in sight of the god have always been the beginnings of the Chandragiri empire under various dynasties. Chandragiri is now familiar to the devout as the place from which the ascent to the Tirupati hills is the easiest and to students of history as the capital of a Yadava dynasty of kings about whom few historical details are yet available........" V. N. Srinivasa Rao : *Chandragiri*, Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society, January, 1933, pp. 375-6.

"The fisher boy's image has a tragic face," remarked Chinta Dikshatlu, an Andhra writer. "I got it from the lips of a beggar and got it published in *Jayanti* which is not current now."

The fisher boy mentions different kinds of fish as the names of his father, mother, sister, brother, wife and even his own name. The *Jalla Konku* is an important fish. The *Mattagirsa* fish has a flat back and is very pleasant to the taste. The *Royyipeechu* is a long and thin fish with big moustaches. The *Yisukadondu* and *Bommirayyi* are two other members of the vast fish family. The fisher boy must use his net while he goes out fishing; the babu, however, may catch him by the neck without a net, without a trap, and he has no escape.

The features of various castes, *Kapu*, *Kammás* and *Reddis*, etc., who are all peasants, may look, more or less, the same; and even a Málá, treated as an untouchable, has no less a physical charm. "..........In the next field we came upon young Gubbayya, so he names himself, sitting under a stack, and twisting palm-fibre into plough-ropes with the air of a copper angel. He is only a Málá, it seems, though he wears curled locks like a Rajput.........."[1]

Yet some of the folk-songs must be tribal in character, their features varying in strength and spirit as we go from caste to caste, clan to clan.

Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf could be the title of one of these songs:

To Jaggàipet I went all agog,
As seeds are thrown in the field, he sowed his love :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

[1] Oswald J. Couldrey, *South Indian Hours*, p. 102.

For rupees five-and-twenty a shapely cot I bought,
I slept not on it even once :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

For half a rupee a bodice, bedecked with mirrors, I bought,
O this bodice of mine is not even a bit torn :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

To Kotappa fair I went and a half-wig I bought,
O this *Koppu* of mine is not even a bit ruffled :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

Milk of the white cow I brought, *ghee* of the black cow I brought,
I had all my heart upon my man :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

When bread is baked, I'll cook the *Gongura* leaves in the evening,
And at night on them I'll feed you :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

The kernel of a tender cocoanut I'll get and keep it in milk,
O the skimmed juice I'll give you :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

My *sigá* I'll take away ; rather a *Koppu* I'll make and I'll put on the forehead a vermilion-mark,
Else my coiffure itself I'll laugh at me :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

The mat of date-palm leaves is for my man, jute stuff I'll spread for the guest,
My man and me haven't met since long :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

This side a *Kulthi* field, that side an *Anumula* field,
And down below a cotton field :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

For rupees three a pearl-spangle for my forehead I bought,
O this spangle of mine is not even a bit worn off :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

Boorele I made by frying and kept for him in the basket,
O now you take these *boorele*, my darling !
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

On the boulder on your way beside the rock stand O,
And do leave some hint before you go :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

Seated on a gold-flowered *Peeta* I was married to that young man,
O his love I haven't seen so far :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

A royal calf you are, a calf of Rajamahendri,
A calf capable of going to the ghat :
Mother Calf, Calf, O Calf !

It is a trible folk-song of the Gangi Reddis as Adivi Bapiraju, a dean of new Andhra art and literature, told me. Mr. Bapiraju knew the haunting melody of this song since his childhood days; in July 1939, he got the text from a woman. Jaggaipet is some 40 miles from Bezwada ; the seeds being thrown in a field is, indeed, an appealing image of love-making in peasant-life. *Dooramma*, or mother calf, is a term of endearment for the calf ; the whole refrain being *Dooramma doora doora*, mother calf, calf, O calf. The peasant woman tells her story to her calf. The *Koppu*, in the fourth stanza, is a simple hair-arrangement in which the flowing hair is tied in a knot at the back ; this knot is thrust underneath the hair from below. The *Sigá*, in the eighth stanza, is an elaborate piece of coiffure ; the hair, turned into a beautiful pig-tail, is coiled up at the back following the old, rich tradition. *Boorele* makes a special item of the Andhra dinner ; the *Urad* species of pulses turned into a sort of paste, a hole is made in each piece with the finger before it is fried in sesame oil. The pearl-spangle,

bought for three rupees, must refer to imitation pearls. The bodice, bedecked with mirrors, in the third stanza, throws light on the old age of the song; one could have it for half a rupee in the happy past.

Andhra dance songs have a charm of their own. Many of these songs are drawn from the ancient epic stories and legends. Others cling to realism.

Couldrey's impressions of Andhra folk-dances have genuine words of praise and insight: "It was the custom for the various guilds and castes of the neighbourhood to send choirs of dancers to the Dhavleshwaram car-festival, which was held every year on a day in February about two miles from the river. These choirs danced in the village-street after nightfall, each choir forming a ring about a lamp with many branches, like a burning bush of brass, and singing in response to their choirmaster or coryphæus, whose exacting business it was, not only to lead and inflame the dance and song, but to keep alive the many fiery tongues of the lamp as well......the feast of god Narsimham, who dwelt in the temple on the Dhavleshwaram promontory......there was no formal competition between the dancing-choirs......The orchestral lamp of the smiths of Dhavleshwaram, for instance, was glorious with parrots of brass and branching tracery, and twinkled with points of light like a little universe, while the choristers themselves were nearly as splendid in their golden ornaments and muslin tunics of purple and crimson; whereas the Málás danced naked to the waist, and their candelabrum was a sorry skeleton of scrap-iron. But in actual dance and song the poor outcasts were by no means out of the running...they yielded to none as regards the grace, the tunefulness, and the transfiguring fervour of their youthful coryphæus. These choric

dances are performed by the villagers themselves in every village."[1]

The leader of a dancing-choir may be a poet-musician, and he may compose a new dance-song as the choric dance continues. Every new dance-song is a real folk-song for its seed lies in community-singing. The original poet-musician, who composes the new song as he leads the dance, is no more an individual; he is the mouth-piece of the whole community.

The dance-forms have their own local variations. Every dance-form should be studied separately. Some of the dances may vary from district to district, clan to clan. They must be seen over and over again before their steps and mass action sink into the mind.

Andhra folk-dances and songs should be preserved by the modern scientific apparatuses: folk-dances must be recorded through the cinematograph and folk-songs through the phonograph.

A decade ago, in 1932, Professor P. Sambamurthy observed in London: "South India is at present in need of a Cecil Sharp to give a stimulus to the study of folk-music. Something should be done to record the rich folk-songs of the country. The sooner it is undertaken the better, for the folk-music is already beginning to perish on account of the inroads, of the modern civilisation into rural parts. The easiest and the cheapest method of recording folk-music is through the phonogram. The Madras Government might be invited to inaugurate a Phonogram Archive (on the model of one in Berlin), wherein the recorded folk-music in cylinders from the several districts might be made available to the public.

[1] Oswald Couldrey, *The Heart of the Poor Cattle Keeper*, Treveni, November 1928.

The initial and recurring cost of such a scheme is very small."[1]

Folk-dances, like the ancient folk-songs, are rapidly disappearing. If we are going to have phonogram archives to save the folk-music of various parts of India from sinking into oblivion, we must also have cinematograph archives for our folk-dances, which may be recorded on sound-and-colour films. Their genuineness and originality must be preserved scientifically in the phonograms and cinematographs. Songs and dances must be picked out according to their quality. Each province must have its own fund for inaugurating the much-needed museum of folk arts.

Andhra would do well to hurry up to inaugurate its National Museum of Folk Arts; almost all the expressions of Andhra folk-genius deserve to be preserved and revived through it. Before the actual phonographic and cinematographic recording is started, a complete academic edition of Andhra folk-songs must be brought out utilizing the services of all the folksong-collectors as also of Nedunuri Gangadharam.

The revival of Andhra folk-songs will give birth to a new kind of Andhra poetry. Rabindranath Tagore knew the value of the people's poetry when he said: "Of course, as in the case of all poetry, folk-poems have different degrees of merit. The living stream that flows from the genius of a true poet has its origin, like the mythical river *Mandákini*, in an unattainable world. Then come those others who set to work digging canals to take the water to the cornfields. They labour hard, but at their hands, it becomes variously tainted by artificiality."

[1] P. Sambamurthy: "South Indian Folk-Music," *Indian Art and Letters*, Vol. VI, No. I, p. 34.

The modern poetry seeks new inspiration. The poet to-day must respond to the people's emotions and similes of life and death. He must listen to the peasant singing of his plough and sickle. He must listen to the mother singing the eternal cradle-songs. He must sit by the fireside where the sons of the soil gather to celebrate the eternal spirit of friendship. He must know the thoughts that the spinning-wheel brings to the mind of the spinner. And in his own poems and songs he must interpret the real power of the people. His poetry should be the mirror of the people's mind struggling for new life.

The story of the great Andhra Kingdom is famous in Indian history. Andhra peasants and workers to-day strive for a people's government. We can hope for the great future of Folk Arts Movement in Andhra Resurgent.

10

Lakshmana and Urmila

LAKSHMANA's Laughter is a significant Telugu ballad. The long range of Andhra Women's Songs known as *Strilá Pátálu*, that has yielded this first-hand theme, is rightly proud of its poetic merit. The only Telugu ballad that challenges comparison with this is *Urmílá's Sleep.* Lakshmana is an ideal brother and Urmila an ideal wife.

Some of the portions of the song, that were rather burdensome and full of stock repetitions, that even sometime seemed to defraud the main theme, have been omitted. Many of these stock repetitions, I believe, are often interpolations. *Lakshmana's Laughter,* freed from some of the cumbersomeness of the text, I am sure, has gained a fresh charm.

The language is not purely representative of the spoken Telugu : here and there appear Sanskritic touches that go to prove its origin amidst the middle-classes. Some of the words are obscure, rather defunct, and their rendering involved a considerable difficulty. Some of the phrases are, more or less, unintelligible, even to the women themselves. The cheaply printed text, that is sold in the bazar, is redolent of mistakes committed by the printer's devil ; and it has been a problem to prepare a workable text with the help of the various editions by different publishers. In some cases it needed repair, no less than minute patch-work. Andhra

legend is more closely related to Lakshmana's fourteen years' long service, inspired by sense of undeviating purity, towards the great Rama and Seeta.

Lakshmana passed the fourteen years without food and sleep, the Andhra people would tell you, and he devotedly followed the routine of bringing wild fruits for his brother and sister-in-law every day as they lived in the forest. It seems one day Seeta, while taking fruit with her husband inside the hut, said: "It is really strange, my lord, that we never ask Lakshmana to partake the fruit with us. He takes the whole trouble of bringing the fruit for us, and again he goes out to guard the hut. And we never ask if the poor man has taken anything himself." Rama said, "My brother is wise enough. Why worry? He must be taking his share in the forest itself." But Seeta insisted on her husband's going to Lakshmana to give him two or three *Amritapáni* plantains that he had brought for them that day. Rama had to yield. Lakshmana could not refuse his brother's gift. But how could he eat? It was his vow before God Almighty to abstain from food and sleep for all the fourteen years. Nor could he throw away the *Amritapáni* plantains that his great brother gave him. And, as the legend says, he had to tear out his thigh to hide them within the flesh, where, he was sure, they could preserve their freshness for as long time as he desired.

The *Amritapáni Plaintans* is a small extract from a long song, called *Lanká Yàgam*, or Lanka's Slaughter; we find Lakshmana tearing up his thigh to show the plantains from within.

Urmila's Sleep touches a fine cord. The sentiment it represents is sincere. As we pass from one line to

another, after the preliminary piece that looks rather conventional and even distorted, the whole picture comes before us like a revelation, stirring us and instilling into us the desire of completing it according to our own vision. We actually follow Lakshmana, as he goes to the moon-faced Urmila, his wife, who had been lying on her bed slumberously for a long period of fourteen years offended by her husband's denial to her yearning of accompanying him to the forest like her own sister whom her husband had allowed readily. He had not cared to meet Urmila even after he had returned from the forest. We find him rousing his wife from her long sleep. It is all a genuine dream—a real poetic material, worthy of an artist's brush ; it is a golden canvas, alive with a page of history wedded to mythology.

While the responsibility for the final form of the songs is entirely mine, the full credit of the most laborious nature of the translation-work, with every minute detail and shade, literal to the bones belongs to my two Andhra friends, Sri Singaracharya and Sri Srinivasacharya ; but for their help it would not have been possible for me to arrive at the the present renderings, which, I am sure, preserve the original spirit of the songs.

LAKSHMANA'S LAUGHTER.

In the moonlit, wide courtyard,
Where thousands of royal chairs were arranged,
The descendants of Kosola Raj,
All kind souls, who could lead the entire world,
Held gloriously an open *durbar*.

Lo ! Vibhishana brought betels,
And he offered them to King Rama :
The king received betels and gave them
To all the learned Brahmins,
While on the left the Vánara Army mustered strong,

Vibhishana was presented with many a cloth of cotton and silk and gold.

Coming with riches and horses adorned with gold
and numerous soldiers following him,
As King Rama's own devotee, Sugriva,
Stood and bowed respectfully before him,
The king said, 'How affairs are going on in the frontier ?'
Approaching the throne and pressing reverently
The lotus-feet of King Rama, who surpassed the courage of a lion,
Sugriva, the offspring of the Son-God, asked for boons.

When it was all calm in the durbar,
The victorious king's great brother, Lakshmana,
Whose intimacy with the king outshone all,
Suddenly felt rather indisposed.
Falteringly he murmured a bit
And falteringly he brooded ;
Gradually he woke up from his nap,
And soon he fell into nap again,
Unconsciously he shook and bent his head.
Thus in the durbar of his brother,
Who looked like a diamond image ;
As if hearing something from his within,
Lakshmana got up from his seat and laughed.

As he burst into laughter the king grew pale ;
And in the full durbar it saddened the hearts of all,
Siva reflected and said to himself :
The blue fisherwom, the Ganges, I placed
on my head raising my locks,
And thinking of that Lakshmana laughed to-day ;
Thus musing Siva bent his head in the durbar.

Jambavanta reflected and said to himself :
Invited with love along with many others to Siva's marriage
As I was running on the errand,
Stepping forward with my small-calved legs,
A hill struck my sole and broke ;
And thinking of that Lakshmana laughed to-day ;
Thus musing Jambavanta bent his head in the durbar.

Neela reflected and said to himself :
God's images that my father worshipped,
Without anyone's notice I threw them in the water ;
Father turned wrathful and cursed me,
And thinking of that Lakshmana laughed to-day ;
Thus musing Neela bent his head in the durbar.

Angada reflected and said to himself :
The king, who killed my father,
Unashamedly I serve him and thinking of that Lakshmana laughed to-day ;
Thus musing Angada bent his head in the durbar.

Sugriva reflected and said to himself :
Killing my brother with Rama's help,
And having his wife as my rightful queen,
I, the *Kapeendra*, am ruling over Kishkindha,
And thinking of that Lakshmana laughed to-day ;
Thus musing Sugriva bent his head in the durbar.

Vibhishana reflected and said to himself :
Divulging the secrets and planning the way,
I killed thousands of armies of my brother Ravana, and became Lanka's king ;
And thinking of that Lakshmana laughed to-day ;
Thus musing Vibhishina bent his head in the durbar.

Hanuman reflected and said to himself :
I may be big, but I am big for mere name's sake,
In Meghnad's hands I was captured ;
And thinking of that Lakshmana laughed to-day ;
Thus musing Hanuman bent his head in the durbar.

Bharta and Shattrughana said to themselves :
Our mother Kaikaye laying hold on the whole kingdom
Sent Rama to the forest,
And now we are by Rama's side ;
And thinking of that Lakshmana laughed to-day ;
Thus musing Bharta and Shattrughana bent their heads.

Daughter of the earth, Seeta, reflected and said to herself :
Rama keeps me in his lap,
Me whom Ravana had captured in the dark forest ;
And thinking of that Lakshmana laughed to-day ;
Thus musing Seeta bent her head in the durbar.

Beholding the whole durbar,
And then looking into Seeta's grave face,
Rama felt belittled and said :
O what's the reason for all this hubbub ?

The king felt wrathful at Lakhshmana's laughter
And said : "I'll cut your head !"
And he lifted up his sword against Lakshmana ;
At once Seeta caught hold of his hand,
All in the durbar rushed to intervene.

"O king, is not Lakshmana mere a boy ?" said Seeta,
"Is it fair, O King,
To behead Lakshmana ?
O hero, O brave one ; O valorous one ? "

What reason, brother, why did you laugh tell me ?
When thus thundered the king, it seemed
As if the earth trembled and the sky slightly showered,
And the lotus-eyed Seeta shook in her shoes,
Out of fear Rama's feet she pressed.

Thus Lakshmana commenced his speech :
O noble-minded and generous-hearted king,
O fulfiller of wishes of devotees like the divine *Kalapabriksha*[1],
A liberal soul indeed you are ;
A gem of a king you are, King Ramachandra,
How pious you are, why argue with you ?
O King, O supreme descendant of Ikshváku,
Pray hear me, O master of the people.

Long ago when we went to the forest
And in a hut of leaves we lived, O great soul,

[1]The mythological tree in heaven.

Like the eyelid to the pupil,
When I took upon me your service,
Marking me thus at one midnight
The goddess of sleep came to me.
In the guise of a woman as she appeared,
I said : " Who are you, O woman, with winking eyes ?"

"I'm goddess of Sleep, O prince," she returned,
"O with the eight elephants of eight corners of the earth,
With the early seers, with gods in heaven I live :
With the seven seas, with the barren lands,
With flowing rivers I roam and live :
With all species of birds, with mountains,
With the trees I live :
O no human being dare get over me !"

I said : " I'll keep aloof, no need of you ;
How unescapable is the margin of your command,
Turning round her thrice, I lay prostrated before her.
"For my brother and his wife ", I said, "at the hut of leaves
I keep guard, pray go to Ayodhya, where
Severed from me, my wife cannot bear the strain,
So that she does not wake up by night or day,
Go to her, O white-eyed Sleep !

In the golden Ayodhya when we'll be in the durbar, with armies and ministers,
Then you may come to me," I prayed.
And now not missing a single moment,
At the right hour as the goddess came, I gladly laughed.

When Lakhshamana thus cleared his position,
The King bent his head and shed many a tear.

He thought and said to himself :
Nothing can atone for a sin so horrible.

Vasishta the seer got up and said :
It is no use feeling sad, O king,
Make a bed for Lakshmana and when he sleeps,
Do press his feet, without any sense of humiliation.

Joyfully the King received this counsel,
And ordered the decoration of whole Ayodhya.
Within the seven-storeyed golden palace
At once the silken bed was spread,
Plenty of *chemanti* and *sirisha* flowers
Were laid on the beautiful bed.
The petals of *mogali* flowers were kept as pillows,
Lilies and *jájis* were scattered on the bed.

Angada, Hanuman and Sugriva with arms on each other's shoulders
Came soon in the durbar and said :
Beyond description is the beauty of Ayodhya ;
God Almighty made but two eyes,
Even if seen with a thousand eyes
One cannot drink in the beauty of the scene.

Lakshmana turned round thrice, prostrated and said :
Brother, now bid me go.
Lifting up his brother from his feet said Rama :
You look so tired,
Go and sleep, brother dear.
Lakshmana prostrated before Seeta, too, though she said :
Don't do it please.

On Bhadra elephant then mounted Lakshmana,
The drummers walked beating their drums in front,
And as the royal bards sang his praises,
He entered the gate of the royal palace.

A lotus-eyed maid massaged the oil on his person,
Another delivered a silken *dhoti*,
With a graceful gait, her *sari* slipping from her bosom,
Came Urmila with sidelong glances.
Near the bed stood she—that lotus-eyed.

Guessing his wife's intention, he said :
Woman, it is no time for you to come.
When Urmila had gone from the bed chamber,
Lakshmana thought ofthe goddess of sleep and fell asleep.

As he slept for half an hour,
It looked like three hours.
As he slept for three hours,
It looked like full one day.
What is this, King Rama thought,
My brother sleeps so long.
Hanuman, go and find if he is exchanging jokes with his queen,
Or if he is playfully taking his bath with her.

Running, Hanuman went to Lakshmana's palace,
Running he came and said :
Lakshmana is still asleep.
Urmila is not present there.

Since Urmila was not near Lakshmana
King Rama became eager to go and see his brother himself,
His ministers he left there
And came with Shattrughana to Lakshmana's chamber ;
Shattrughana he left in the outer room,
He came in and sat on Lakshmana's bed.

Placing Lakshmana's feet in his lap
King Rama pressed them again and again.
The first time as his feet were pressed, Lakshmana was quiet,
The second time he thought he was dreaming,
The third time he opened his eyes and saw
It was no dream, it was reality ;
Frightfully he saw and found it was no dream,
No dream, all reality, with his own eyes he saw.

Knowing that it was King Rama himself.
He got up, lay prostrate before him and said :
I am younger and I should press your feet.

Lifting up his brother from his feet
King Rama seated him on the gold sofa and said :
As a night is without the moon,
So is my durbar, brother, without you.
As a house is without a lamp,
So is my durbar, brother, without you.

As a wife is without her husband,
So is my durbar, brother, without you.
As the auspicious pitcher is without water,
So is my durbar, brother, without you.
As a song would well up from a poet's heart,
So come, pray come, brother, to my durbar.
Modestly Lakshmana got up from the sofa
And there he stood before Rama ;
Then both of them made for the durbar.

King Rama then said :
Do ye all hear me, great seers ?
Mine and Lakshmana's marriage, O Vaishita,
Were celebrated at one time you know,
And then passed a period of fourteen years,
Pray secure now a festive occasion.

The seers sat and joyfully opened their almanacs ;
In the holy, auspicious Kártik month,
On a Sunday that fell on the fifth of the fortnight,
At night, about quarter to twelve,
They fixed the time for the festival.

Looking into the seers' faces in the durbar,
The King said : " Can I see my brothers' queens ?
" Without appearing before the young ladies,
You can see them, it is no wrong," they said.

Smilingly the King looked at Seeta's face and said :
"Queen, your sisters, my brothers' wives,
Now how would you show them to me ?
A king who wishes to see the queens of palace,
Never before you expressed such a wish."

"Pray raise no objection, Seeta,
Joyfully my sister Shanta approved of my wish,
All seers and elders, too, have blessed my wish.
Come, Hanuman, you son of the god of air,
Go to King Rama and ask him to come to the palace ;

Said Shanta with a smile dancing on her lips.

Hanuman left for the durbar at once,
And aptly delivered the message ;
Listening to Hanuman's words,
King Rama left the ministers there,
And came quickly taking Shattrughana with him.

Steadily looking towards a window inside
Rama caught glimpse of a beautiful face and said :
" What a woman—like lightning during early rains,
With the carriage of a swan, an image of gold
Gazing like a doe he who applies sandal to Shanta's person,
O who is she, say brother Shattrughana ? "
" Brother, she is Lakshmana's wife Urmila."

" The other lady with small feet like new-come leaves,
With teeth like gems, she who is fanning Shanta,
O who's she, say brother Shattrughana ? "
" Brother, she's Bharta's queen ! "

" The other lady with feet like fresh leaves,
With the waist of a lion, hands so divine, complexion so arresting
Her eye-brows like Cupid's bow, her eyes beautiful as lotuses,
Rows of her teeth like those of pomegranate-seeds,
Her cheeks like *Chemanti* buds, the moon feels modest before her.
The lustre of her face so matchless ;
Even the heads of bees filled with humming,
Can hardly match the beauty of her locks
That dark-complexioned lady, her face all smiles !
O who is she, say brother Shattrughana ?"

Shattrughana kept quiet : he did not tell that she was his own wife.
Beholding his brother, who stood there modestly,
Rama smiled and remarked : " O what penance did you perform in the past birth
To get a wife as such ?
Behold, brother, our sister Shanta, amidst her attendants,
She looks like the crescent moon amidst stars ;

Behold Seeta, your sister-in-law,
Beautious she calls herself,
Though eight curves have marred her form ! "

"No, brother Rama, we shouldn't say so,
Seeta is the goddess of wealth herself,
Strange words you utter to-day,
On an auspicious occasion as this
Come along, brother Rama, let's take our dinner."

Come, Hanuman, you son of the God of air,
Quickly go to the stable
And bring horses of best breed.

They fetched water from the Ganges, and bathed the horses,
Their bodies they wiped and worshipped them ;
They gave them good eatables,
With garlands of pearls they adorned their necks.

The elephant that King Dasratha mounted in former days
Said as if, "I will carry King Rama now."
And he came dragging his right legs in ecstasies of joy.

" Brothers, you are riding the horses," said Lakshmana,
" When all the seers are present here,
Does it really become you to ride ? "

" At marriage-time, Lakshmana," said the brothers,
" Or at a function as this, it is no wrong."

On the best horses rode King's brothers,
King Rama mounted the Bhadra elephant ;
In front walked the drummers beating their drums,
Musicians chanted songs and bards sang praises to the King,
The nymphs sang and danced,
Thus in procession they passed through the royal gate.

The people ascended the balconies,
Some waved camphor-lamps and chanted their *Aratis* in honour of the King ;

Steadily they all looked at the procession,
As if without shutting their eye-lids even once.

The procession came back and entered the gate of the fort.
Under the canopy of green leaves appeared Queen Kaikaye ;
King Rama stood there amidst his brothers.

Curiously the people rushed in from all directions,
Anjana's son Hanuman, with canes in his hands,
Commanded them to stand in rows.

Beholding Hanuman frightening the people, said Lakshmana :
" They have come to see the King at his auspicious hour,
You take them to task, O who are these people after all ?
O are they not our own friends ?"

The moon-faced Shanta thus spoke :
Come, Hanuman, now go and ask them all to come for the dinner,
Ask them to make haste
For all the preparations have been made.

Kaushalya herself looked after the arrangement of the dishes,
The Ganges water was served to drink
In the row where sat the King,

Curries of beans, snake-gourds, *karelas* and unripe plantains,
Apart from the fried *Garavadiyámu* cakes,
Full sixty kinds of curry along with the *dál*
They served in the row where sat the King.

The maids of honour served abundantly cow's *ghee*,
The rice cooked in milk, too, they served.

Talking of happenings in Lanka they commenced the dinner,
They had forgotten to invite Hanuman ;
Low he suddenly appeared on the scene
With his face all pale.

" Since you are an inmate of the household," said King Rama,
" We have been so informal with you ;
Now come and sit beside me,
For no friend have I like you.

" Isn't it due to you that I got Seeta back
And am ruling over Ayodhya ?
Isn't it due to you that I can dine with my brothers to-day ?
My good man, now sit beside me."

" But I am not worthy," said Hanuman,
" Of sitting beside you at dinner."

The dinner was over and Hanuman snatched away the King's plate ;
He climbed up the *Avisi* tree and kept one morsel of food on a branch,
Thinking of taking it on the twelfth of the fortnight,
And lo, he threw down the plate.

King Rama stood under the tree stretching out his hands,
And said : " O come down, Hanuman ! "
In ecstasies of joy a necklace of pearls,
King Rama put round Hanuman's neck.

Looking towards Lakshmana, Hanuman said :
In the durbar you laughed,
On this festive dinner to-day I got this necklace,

O it is all due to you, Lakshmana.
Pray laugh again I say,
So that I get another necklace.

Whosoever would sing or hear this song,
God Almighty would allot her a place in heaven.

THE AMRITAPANI PLANTAINS

Standing behind the clouds, Ravana's son Indrajeet
Rained arrows on our camp ;
O if one is not a pure man—a man who abstained
From food and sleep for fourteen years,
One can't overthrow him in the battle.

Where to find a man as such in the world ?
Rama sighed, how to cope with it ?
Then Lakshmana said : " I am that pure man,
I really abstained from food and sleep for fourteen years.

" But what about the *Amritápáni* plantains," said Rama,
That I gave you that day ?
Tell me, Lakshmana, where are they ?"
Then Lakshmana tore out his thigh
And within he showed the *Amritápáni* plantains.

URMILA'S SLEEP

The coronation was over, and now King Rama sat in the *durbar*,
Bharta, Shatrughana and Lakshmana duly serving him,
Hanuman, the son of air, pressing Rama's feet respectfully,
Sugriva kneeling reverently, and Tumbura and Narda entertaining him with their songs
Rambha and other girls of heaven performing their beautiful dances,
Sanaka and other famous seers immersed in discussions, religious and philosophical,
And all the gods making obeisance ;
Flowers rained over them that morning,

Having a full view of the whole *durbar*, and turning to her husband's face,
Seeta, with her heart yearning for atonement
Came to Rama and folding her hands she said :
"O god of gods, pray let me have my say,
Please hear and take into consideration,
As even the divine serpent *Shesha* would hear,
Mine is just a small plea ;
With your brother Lakshmana, when we were leaving for the forest,
Urmila, his wife, seeing him accompanying us,
Became anxious to follow him,

But Lakshmana saying, 'No, you'll remain here!'
Left her and proceeded to serve us.
Since that day Urmila has been lying on her bed in deep slumber
Ordering your brother Lakshmana
Pray do send him at least now
To Urmila—that moon-faced woman."

When Seeta ended her speech.
Brooding over it Rama felt greatly sad,
Wonderingly he addressed Lakshmana :
Brother, just come nearer,
O hurry up, Lakshmana, and come here ;
Is it fair to abstain from your wife, that beautiful woman ?
It is high time ; do go to her even now.
With your words, sweet and lively,
Mitigate her pangs of grief even now.

Since he made Rama speak thus,
Soon Lakshmana left the durbar,
Saying *mahāprasādam* agreeably in reply.

Crossing the front yards of marble-inns, he reached his residence ;
Entering his bed-chamber, he saw his parrot-voiced wife ;
He pressed the soft-skinned Urmila's thighs,
And put her sari in right order.
Then wearing the befitting garment,
And sprinkling drops of cool water on Urmila's person,
Lakshmana sat down on her bed
With the voice of a deserter on his lips :
The moon craves, O woman, to steal a glance at your face.

Though you gave up betel-chewing long ago,
Yet your smiling under-lip
Looks fresh like the tip of a sprouting leaf
O speak to me like the pouring down of nectar ;
Pray appease my soul, and put on gold on your lotus-like feet.

Urmila, who lay since long forgetting herself, began to quiver.
Who are you, O man ?——she broke forth,
It seems you came for mischief-making.

Searching through passages, small and narrow,
You come to do such a wrong, when none else is present,
O did you start for this solitary corner ?
If my father, King Janaka, will hear
He won't keep quiet till he pronounces a heavy punishment ;
If my sister and her husband, King Rama, will hear
It may result in danger to your life ;
Even if my sister alone will hear,
Certainly she won't spare your life on the face of the earth.
What ill fame comes to a great lineage, O what shall I do ?

Though born in a celebrated family, ill fame comes to me, O what shall I do !
Was it not for desiring to require another's wife alone
That Indra's body was spoiled ?
And knowing all you come to do such a wrong !
O have you no sisters and mother like me ?

As Urmila ended, Lakshmana, who heard it attentively, felt sorry and said :
I am Rama's own brother,
Who else is like him in the whole creation ?
And am I not the son-in-law of King Janaka ?
Who else is Janaka on the face of the earth !
O woman, born of a hundred-petalled flower,
Am I not Seeta's own brother-in-law ?
Else, O Lord of creation, who else is Seeta on earth

O they call you Urmila in the world,
I swear by your name and tell no lie ;
Leaving father Dashrath as we went to the Forest,
There Seeta was kidnapped by Ravana
We put Ravana to death and brought her back.
O if I wrongly raised my hand, O moon-faced woman,
I'll myself become infamous.

Am I not Seeta's own brother-in-law, O woman ?
Be kind now and get up,
Since I departed from you, my sweetheart,
I have known no food nor sleep
O if you won't get up my love, O I won't live any longer.

With his eyes full of tears Lakshmana again broke forth
I'll kill myself.
And he suddenly took his sword out of the sheath.
As he argued thus, Urmila got up with a shock.
Knowing for certain that he is her lord,
The soft-hearted woman felt rejuvenated
So lotus-eyed Urmila then bowed down
At her husband's feet, sacred like the lotus flowers.

Lifting her up with his hands,
Lakshmana embraced Urmila and wiped her eyes, wet with tears,
My father, king Janaka, wrongly put his trust in you
And married me to you, Urmila went on to say,
Thinking that his son-in-law was a prince how he rejoiced.
Intent on doing whatever comes into their head,
How they often take pledges that belittle woman.

As Urmila stopped speaking, Lakshmana, overwhelmed with sorrow,
Perceived the meaning of the comment
Of woman with beautiful teeth, made in a sorrowful mood.
He began in a soothing tone :
O why still feel sorry, my dearie ?
In some previous birth, we might have severed some pious husband and wife,
What if several ages pass, we can't resist the law of *Karma*.

When Kaushalya found the husband and wife, immersed in sorrow,
She brought the *champak*-scented oil,
And making them sit on gemmy *Peethas*,
She massaged it on their heads.

A maid of honour brought sandal-pastes for them ;
Giving them a bath in lavender-water,
She began to wipe Laksmana's body with a fine silk.

The maid of honour dressed Urmila in gold embroidered silk
The blouse she gave her to wear
Shone as if with the rays of one crore of sums.

Urmila looked like the goddess of wealth
With many an ornament and jewel.

The maid of honour made a *tilka* mark on Lakshmana's forehead with pearly *Tiruchurnamu* powder.
Urmila, the precious gem, looked at her reflection along with her husband
Standing before the big mirror;
Shyly she bent her head and stood there with a smile.

Then Rama, the *Rájshekkhra,* came and sat in the dining-hall
On a *pithá*, bedecked with *Ani* pearls
Luxuriously like the god Indra.
Come in, O gem of a sister-in-law,
With these words Rama welcomed Urmila.

All lovely shyness, Urmila looked like a parrot,
While she bent her head to the other side.
The anklets tinkled on her feet
As she walked in with the gait of a swan,
How graceful she looked like an image of beauty.

Sumitra gave a seat to Urmila, who smiled briskly, near her son;
In gold plates she served them five *Parmánnams.*
In silver cups Kaushalya brought *ghee*;
And Sumittra put cow's *ghee* and *Atirasmu* sweet before her son.

Shanta, so fond of flowers, then spoke to Lakshmana,
The affectionate son of Sumittra,
Brother, for fourteen years in the forest
You stayed without food and sleep;
All fatigue you would forget, brother,
O take sweets and *ghee* and *Bobbat* cakes to your heart's content.
Take cream and butter, you all,
And drink the buttermilk after your own hearts.

Lo! they finished off the dinner,
To their hearts' content they ate and got up,

With the water of the Ganges they washed their hands.
As they all took to betel-chewing, Shanta remarked jokingly:
Give audience to me, O Seeta, daughter of King Janaka,
O what a good woman is Urmila,
On her gold bed she lay in a swoon for fourteen years,
O where had been hiding the charms of this gold image ?
Perform, O Seeta, the ritual of *Neelálá Aroti* around her face,
No ill eye would harm her then.

When Shanta ended her speech,
Seeta laughed and said :
Your brothers are moons, who can induce even god Indra
Even the moon loves them,
O perform *Neelálá Aroti* to them so that no evil eye will harm them."

Then Shanta laughed and said :
Both Urmila and you are so uncommonly beautiful,
Beware of the ill eye, O coquettes,
O you winners of my brothers' admiration.

Shanta closed her speech and Seeta began :
Rishi Shringi, your husband, who is like a brother to me,
Leaves not your company for a minute in the hermitage,
O you even mock at the simple-minded Rishi.

Shanta aptly replied :
O Seeta, my sister-in-law, you daughter of the earth,
By God's grace you entered our house;
Our family became sacred, O soft-kinned Seeta,
Since you became our daughter-in-law.

Sumittra then provided a couch, with the fine, soft fluffs of swans spread on it,
For her fatigued son.
Placing silk-pillows on it, she sprinkled on it some levender-water.
A parrot-voiced maid of honour brought a *Vatti*[1] fan,
Sandal-paste, and musk and scents like *Punugu* and *Javáddi*
She brought in cups and put beside the couch.
She also put there green betel-nuts and leaves
And pearl-dust to be used instead of lime.

[1] *Khaskhas.*

Lo! there blew the breeze ladden with the fragrance of the Champaks,
And they closed the outer door.
Lo! there blew the breeze that came from the jessamines,
And they sat down on the couch.
To dress her hair after the *Koppu* coiffure
Lakshmana artistically braided Urmila's locks,
And then adorned her pig-tail
With the *Boddu* jessamines and Jáji flowers.

The husband and wife, both together chewing betels.
And exchanging words in sport,
How it was that my sister was captured? Urmila asked,
Brave as lions you were there,
O how was Seeta captured?
You both Rama and Lakshmana by her side,
How it was that the beautiful woman was carried away?

Lakshmana replied calmly:
O is it possible, dearie, even for god Brahma
To escape what is destined?
Setting out from Ayodhyá we lived there in a hut of leaves;
A golden deer came near the door of the hut.
Asking for that dear your sister bowed down at the feet of Rama,
And taking his bow and arrows Rama proceeded to hunt.
Drawing the bow as he shot an arrow,
The deer made a peculiar sound: "Alas! O Seetá. Alas O Lakshmana."

Seeta got frightened and spoke to me;
No, mother, you don't know! I said, as she asked me to go after Rama;
O she said many a word which pierced my ears as arrows.
Drawing a boundary line before her, I went after Rama.
Soon after Ravana, in disguise, saying, *Náráyana*, came and stood before Seeta.
Thinking that he was a devotee of god Vishnu
Readily she prepared to give him alms.
Soon as he showed his ten heads, Seeta swooned with fear.
Digging the block of earth under Seeta, he carried her off to Lanka.

Rama returned with the golden deed but Seeta was no longer there.

We searched the hut and we searched the forest ;
On Kishkindha mountain we met Sugriva.
We are Dashratha's sons, we said, and he offered us a bundle of presents.
As we opened it, Seeta's ornaments were discovered :
Come, brother, thus calling me Rama showed me the ornaments :
I know not all these ornaments, brother, I said,
O I know the anklets alone ;
While every morning I bowed down at her feet, I saw them.

Then calling Hanuman and giving him his ring
And telling Seeta's distinctive marks,
Ram sent him abroad in search of her.
He crossed the sea, searched Ashoka garden and came upon Seeta there,
He gave her the ring and got a gem in return
And talked with her for long,

Hanuman soon returned and stood before Rama :
How am I to bring Seeta back, O King ? he said,
How disarranged her tresses are
What a fire burns in her heart
How unbearable to think about Seeta's hard lot.

Engrossed in sorrow, Rama heard and swooned ;
And when the fit was over,
He perceived the secret of Lanka
And he killed Ravana with his strong and numerous host.

Adorn Seeta and bring her before me, he said,
And when she was brought Rama emphasized :
For ten months she was in the enemy's camp,
O how can I speak with her.
Why curse, why question truth, my lord ? Seeta went on to say,
O ask them to kindle fire.

Seeta played with flames and fire,
Flames that rose high in the sky.

Lo ! the fire turned into a lake,
Seeta, the image of purity, regained Rama's love,

Their sorrows he told to Urmila all,
He did not omit even one.
Did you listen to-day, sisters, the story of Urmila ?
Separated from her husband, she lay on her gold bed for fourteen years,
Not sipping a draught of water.
Brooding over it we are plunged in pathos,
No more brooding over a matter of the past.
Whosoever sings or hears the Song of Urmila's Sleep,
Lakshmana assigns her to Vishnulok.[1]

Lakshmana and Urmila are ideal characters. The Andhra woman is proud of them. It may be noted that Rabindranath Tagore in one of his early essays in *Prâchin Sâhitya* strongly blamed the poet Valmiki for showing indifference towards Urmila, and the contemporary Hindi poet Maithilisaran Gupta, taking his cue from Tagore, wrote *Sâket*, a new Ramayana, laying stress on Lakshmana and Urmila in place of Rama and Seeta. The Andhra ballads are more remarkable in this light ; the narrative gets boring here and there, yet the interest is maintained by an unstudied poetry.

The stamp of feudalism is seen on every stanza of these Andhra ballads, and it may be said that the Andhra people, whose present conditions demand an uncompromising realism, may reject the idealism preached by the old folk poetry. Yet the old stories cannot die. The people cannot disown his past altogether. And even if these songs fail to provide them the inspiration that the past generations could easily draw, they have a great

[1] Heaven.

Auto Bio Poetry

value for us as they provide a window into the past which they alone can open. The rich feasts are mentioned again and again. The gold ornaments and silken garments enrich the picture. The *ghee* lamp in the Arti ceremonies looks strange to the modern mind, for *ghee* one fails to get even as food.

The gramophone and the cinema have been destroying folk-songs. All-India Radio seems to be keen on the revival of Indian folk music. But here too lies a great danger, for many of the folk-songs, recorded in the various studios of Indian broadcasting stations, are given rather modernized tunes. The tendency is to make them look more artistic, yet the result is disastrous, for the genuine beauty and simplicity is destroyed mercilessly.

Folk-songs must be first recorded from the lips of the folk singers. Of course, a fair selection should be kept in view, for every singer is not a good singer, and it is possible that even a folk singer may not be knowing the real tune of a particular song. Later on, as the need should arise, the professional artist can be trained and asked to sing, keeping the charm and the appeal of the ancient folk music alive.

All-India Radio, Madras, has recently recorded the words of Urmila's Sleep, following the traditional Andhra folk music. Let us hope that the recording of other Andhra ballads and folk-songs, too, will soon follow.